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based on
"MOON OF ICE"
in this issue



Barry N. Malzberg
A. E. van Vogt
Robert Silverberg

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AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

MARCH 1982

Cover painting interpreted by
Fabian for "Moon of Ice."

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*Renowned author of SLAN and
THE WORLD OF NULL-A
reveals his secrets of profes-
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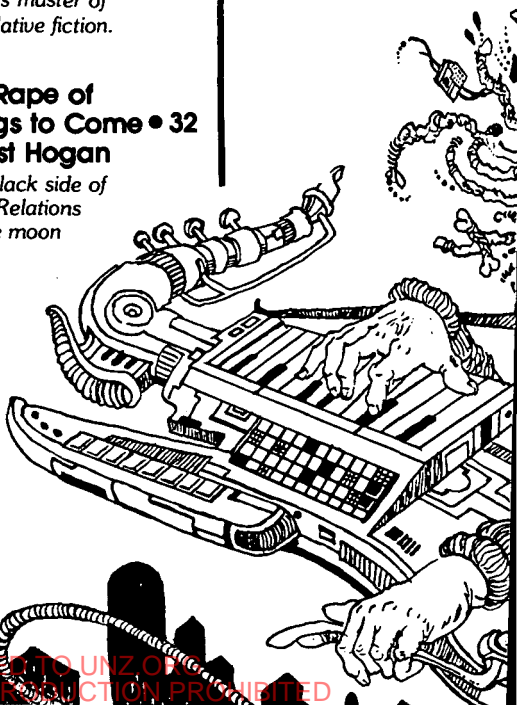
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Robert Silverberg

opinion

CLOSE STUDENTS of the Hugo awards process have pointed out that of the five novels on the 1981 ballot, three — Larry Niven's *RINGWORLD ENGINEERS*, John Varley's *WIZARD*, and Fredrik Pohl's *BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON*, are sequels to successful novels, two of which were themselves award winners. A fourth nominee, Robert Silverberg's *LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE*, is in the process of acquiring a companion book, not exactly a sequel but certainly a closely related work; and now comes a report that the fifth item, Joan Vinge's *THE SNOW QUEEN*, is due for a sequel shortly also. If the Vinge story is correct, it means that all five of the Hugo nominees will turn out to be pieces of some larger saga—an unprecedented and startling situation, which says a great deal about the present state of science-fiction publishing and consumer habits in the United States.

The sequel phenomenon is nothing new in science fiction. Half a century ago, E.E. Smith, Ph.D., was winding up his *Skylark* trilogy and getting ready to begin his seven-volume *Lensman* extravaganza; and all those books, which are quite spectacularly badly written but irresistibly inventive, have had a large and enthusiastic following ever since. Edgar Rice Burroughs, about the same time, was bringing forth his innumerable John Carter of Mars books, a Venus series, and of course the Tarzan items. Asimov's *Foundation* books caused much fuss in the 1940's, as did van Vogt's *Weapons Shops* and *Null-A* projects. The Professor Jameson stories of Neil R. Johnes, Simak's *City*, de Camp's *Viagens*, Poul Anderson's *Flandry* and van Rijn tales, Blish's spindizzy stories — the list goes on and on and on. No, nothing new at all.

The popularity of the series for the writer is easy to comprehend. It allows him to serve up more of the same: to return to familiar territory, to use well-established backgrounds and characters and even, in the case of the most mechanical of series concepts, the same plots. Science fiction is peculiarly self-devouring in its demand on a writer's inventiveness: to dream up an entire world, down to the smallest cultural and geographical details, is no minor task, and to do it three or four times a year in a market that pays a cent a word or thereabouts is a formidable drain on even the most fertile mind. How much more comforting to go back to Barsoom, already conveniently in stock in the warehouse, or to tack on one more episode in the adventures of Captain Future, or to think up yet another twist on the slow and inevitable workings-out of Hari Seldon's far-seeing plan!

(I should add that in my own case I always found the familiarity of series material more of a drawback than a benefit. It seemed a bigger burden to go back to something I had written two or three or ten years ago and regain a mastery of the details than it was to dream up something brand new; I hated being bound by my own old ideas. And so, after writing a two-book series in collaboration with Randall Garrett more than a quarter of a century ago, I never again attempted in any serious way to launch a series, although a couple of my novels did appear in magazine form as sequences of novelets, and one or two of my other books did make glancing and usually inaccurate references to events that had appeared in previous Silverberg novels. But now, I too am mining my own older lode. More about that below.)

What the series gives the writer, then, is readymade acceptance and quick concep-

tual uptake. But what does it give the reader? Challenge, strangeness, mystery? Hardly. It provides him with the same old thing that tickled his fancy last month or last year — a reprise, a cozy return to safe territory. Sometimes a writer poses a puzzle so fascinating — who built the Riverworld? Where is the Second Foundation? — that readers will go along happily from book to book to book, waiting to learn the answer: But most series simply provide one more run-through of the original production: Captain Future meets another dire peril, Dominic Flandry thwarts more bad guys, John Carter wins another apocalyptic battle. That's okay, sure, but such books offer little in the way of revelation, illumination, transformation.

And the irony is that science fiction is supposed to be a literature of the strange, the luminously unfamiliar. The theory I always held was that a science-fiction story puts the reader down in some truly unfathomable situation that he could never have conceived himself — in S. Fowler Wright's *World Below*, let's say, or Huxley's *Brave New World* — and leads him to an understanding of its nature and an internalization of its wondrous alienness. To ask of science fiction that it give you more of the same is to defeat one of its great central virtues.

And though I too have made my way pleasantly through many a series, enjoying renewed contact with characters or ideas or scenery that gave me pleasure before, I think that the novels that rewarded me most intensely were always one-of-a-kind items — Bester's *Stars My Destination*, Clarke's *Childhood's End*, Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and half a dozen more. Much of the power of those books comes from the sudden shock of strangeness that a sequel, virtually by definition, is incapable of delivering: not "I have been here before" but "I have never even DREAMED of this before."

The worrisome thing about all those sequels and prequels on this year's Hugo list is that it shows the fans voting overwhelmingly for more of the same, for the tried and true, for the cozily familiar. Publishers take note of such things. Already there is what I

think to be an excessive demand for multiple works: I sometimes suspect it's easier to sell a trilogy these days than a single novel. And the more vociferous the demand for sequels becomes, the harder it will be for that single unique piercing vision, that never-to-be-recaptured idea that positively needs no reprises, to win an audience. Present-day readers seem almost afraid of works that stand by themselves. Frank Herbert's *Dune* had only modest success in its early days of publication; but the fourth go-round of the same idea has done astonishingly well, and after months on the best-seller list *God-Emperor of Dune* may turn out to be the most profitable novel in science-fiction history. Nice going for Frank Herbert and his publishers; a little troublesome for those of us who look at long-term trends.

What about Silverberg, now at work on *Majipoor Chronicles*? It is not, I insist mildly, a sequel to *Lord Valentine's Castle*, since it involves a host of other characters and takes place at earlier periods of Majipoor's history. But it is quite definitely more of the same. I would be very much surprised to find myself writing a true sequel to *Lord Valentine's Castle* — the idea dismays and depresses me — and even though you might point out that I also found myself surprised to be writing LVC in the first place, I'm fairly confident that it won't happen. I can't bear the notion of trundling out Carabella and Deliamber and Valentine and the rest of that crowd for another set of adventures. They had their moment on the stage; I'm done with them forever. But the two books are definitely akin.

Then why *Majipoor Chronicles*?

Because I felt like it. Because I see which way the commercial winds are blowing, and writing is my livelihood. And because I thought I had left some things unexplored in the original book.

All the same, when every book on the Hugo list is only a fragment of a greater work, something in the artistic integrity of the concept of the science fiction novel is being undermined. We are all merrily collaborating in a development whose sequel is likely to be trouble.

Robert Silverberg



Interview

THE MAKING OF A PROFESSIONAL

A.E. van Vogt

With Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot

THE WORD "PROFESSIONAL" is the key word in what I wish to emphasize in this account of my career. Sooner or later, in most activities I undertake, I consciously try to do them professionally.

When I tell you what some of these activities are — mostly writing but not all — I think you will be interested in the thoroughness of the methods involved. Some of these I worked out myself. Others — especially in the field of writing — I was able to absorb from books about how to write.

It is, at first look, presumptuous of me to use a title like "The Making of a Professional." All successful writers, sculptors, painters and television repairmen are professional. The word means somebody who can repeat a learned skill. Such a person knows how to do something over and over again with conscious awareness of what to do.

Obviously, by that definition, every working craftsman in the world is a professional, as I mean the term.

What separates me from the craftsmanship of most of these other professionals is that the majority of them started out with natural talent. I didn't.

All my life I have been what is called a "square." A very serious type of person. A slow thinker. I am one of those odd types who, lacking natural talent and having no natural intuition, had to *think* my way to the state of professionalism.

My first lookback over my working life is a seemingly endless view of me either sitting at a typewriter, or sitting with pen and clipboard. It has the look of a dull exis-

tence. And yet I have always been a cheerful person, who has never felt depressed; which, when I think about it, I ascribe to the professional competence by which I handled my professional career.

I learned to write fiction in (roughly) 800-word scenes. My principal teacher was a book titled, *The Only Two Ways To Write a Story*, by John Gallishaw. Each of the scenes, as advocated by Gallishaw, must have in it five steps; and the narration must be in what he called "fictional sentences." These were (are) different for each type of story.

In writing science fiction, the author is confronted essentially by the need to invent a variant future, or a planet different from Earth. In either case, he has to work out the engineering problems of the new environment.

Recently, as an example, I looked over the solar system; and in the light of the latest discoveries, I decided on a terminology that I would use in any story I might write about this part of space. The words are:

Moon Mission	Jupiter Signal Station Two
Mars Landing	Jupiter Signal Station Three
Venus Control	Saturn Ring Operations
Mercury Outpost	Solar Distance Studies (e.g., Neptune, Uranus, Pluto)
Jupiter Signal Station One	

We are already acquiring special names for the space orbiting conditions and space manufacturing complexes and residences; and I'll take those as already invented by NASA.

The first story I ever finished was a confession-type that sold to *True Story Magazine*. I wrote it at the rate of one scene a day in my then office — a branch of the public library in Winnipeg, Canada. The story was about 9,000 words — eleven of Gallishaw's 800-word scenes. I was paid \$135 — as I recall it. It was 1932, and I was twenty years old.

Eleven days to write it in longhand, another two weeks to type and revise. It was written from the viewpoint of a young woman in her early twenties, and my title for it was, "I Lived in the Streets." In it, she lost her job, couldn't pay her rent, and was turned out by her landlady. That first night, and successive nights, she slept on a bench in a nearby park.

Thus began my literary career, in terms of publication. During the next few years, I sold about a dozen confession-type stories, most of them to the MacFadden Publications.

A writer's career reflects his intellectual development. For a time, when I was first motivated by prize contests to write confession-type stories, the challenge was strictly one of craftsmanship. Shortly after I won first prize in one of *True Story* magazine's contests — in 1935 — I lost interest in that type of story. Forever.

Then, briefly, I found it interesting to write radio scripts. That interest was presently squelched by a self-serving producer-director, who attempted to dictate an unusual amount of morality into the content of the scripts. For a while; then, I was a trade journalist. This lasted longer than it should have. The pay was 20¢ an inch; and only the fact that I represented eight magazines, for which I wrote considerable material every month, was it possible for me to continue at all. Except for the low pay, it was an extremely interesting job. I met and interviewed countless businessmen, some at the top of their professions. It was a good place for a future writer to be; and I still feel that I acquired some equivalent of a degree in business administration.

Such training cannot be had in a college course. It was reality on a level I had not known before. But it was the writing of science fiction, beginning in late 1938 — first publication in July, 1939 — that required a sustained interest in intellectual matters, transcending everyday reality, and having no parallel in any other field of fiction writing.

In *Black Destroyer* and *Discord in Scarlet*, I converted Oswald Spengler's cyclic history theories into story form. In *Sian*, the concept of a higher mutation than man excited several generations of science fiction readers. Similarly, in *The World of Null-A*, I envisioned a new world of the future in which General Semantics, as defined by Count Alfred Korzybski in his famous book, *Science and Sanity*, made it possible for people to live without government. This time, the person had to take training in the system, was tested by a monster computer called the "Games Machine," and, if he was successful, was allowed to live on Non-Aristotelian Venus with other people who had passed the tests given by the Games Machine.

You'll notice that neither of these invented worlds accepted that an average man, conditioned by his parents, friends, and teachers, was qualified for a stateless society.

Approximately, the same problem is solved in the *Weapon Shop* stories. But there the method is that you can obtain, from the weapon makers, a defensive gun — actually a particle accelerator of some kind — which would only discharge if you used it to defend yourself. In that society, I depicted the two-party system in an extreme form. The forces of the empress were always in power. The forces of the weapon shops provided the defensive weapons to citizens who asked for them.

In all three of these stories, human nature, as we have observed it over the millennia, was considered to be changeless.

As the years went by, after I finished *The World of Null-A*, it developed that Venus was a planet with a surface temperature somewhat too high to support human life. So, in a revision ten or so years ago, I explained that somewhere in the twenty-second century, ice meteors were towed

from the Saturn rings — this would come under the heading of being a Saturn Ring Operation — and put into close orbit around Venus. So that, presently, as the huge meteors (some of them 100 cubic-mile masses) hit the atmosphere, they began to melt, and it began to rain. It didn't just rain forty days and nights, but 4,000 days and nights. And when that rain had washed the atmosphere closer to the surface, there were huge oceans, an oxygen atmosphere, and a whole new invented Venus.

I was very pleased with that invention; and I really think it could be done. But, amazingly, science is moving so rapidly these days that there is actually a fabulous new idea for, so to speak, salting the atmosphere of Venus with a small life form, which feeds on the gases in that strange atmosphere. The prediction is that 90 percent of the atmosphere will presently fall automatically. And in twenty years, Venus will have huge oceans, ample oxygen, and be suitable for human habitation.

At the moment, both my ice meteor idea and the virus injection idea qualify as methods for inventing new worlds.

In connection with such ideas, I was quite interested to read about the first visit Professor Marshall McLuhan made to New York after he became famous. Dr. McLuhan was an English professor from the University of Toronto, Canada, who published a book with a basic new thought in it. The book was titled, *Understanding Media*, and it caused a sensation. The new thought was that such media as radio and television, for example, are themselves the message. Not the programs. Not what the people say or do.

Madison Avenue, New York, where the great national USA advertising agencies have their headquarters, was stunned by the implications. Dr. McLuhan was invited to come to New York to deliver a speech to the leading advertising people. For this one speech, he received a whopping \$35,000. This was at a time when the dollar was still valuable.

I mention Professor McLuhan for this reason: During the week that he spent in New York, a group of high-level reporters accompanied him everywhere he went. And they were astonished by the consis-

tency of his responses.

Among the reporters was Tom Wolfe, a man with an unusually vivid, modern, reportorial style of writing. He wrote an article based on that week with McLuhan, which I read. In it, among other things, Wolfe describes how the reporters took McLuhan to one of those nightclubs where the waitresses parade around naked. Also, they — the women — had all had silicone injections, which greatly enlarged the size of their breasts. So that, as they leaned past you to serve you, a great flapping breast would brush your face.

The reporters waited expectantly for McLuhan's reaction to this scene.

He said, "They're wearing us."

As Tom Wolfe pointed out, it was a statement so original that no one could challenge it.

If you're having a hard time grasping what I'm saying, let me make this comparison: Human beings who leave this planet in spaceships, in the words of McLuhan, will be wearing Earth wherever they go. A woman probably wears men in whatever she does. And a husband wears his wife wherever he goes.

One difference between Professor McLuhan and me is that no reporters are following me around, holding their breath during a confrontation, waiting for my reaction. And there were no reporters around either back in 1939 when my first professional system — my method of writing — was subjected to a major test.

Here's what happened:

In Canada, which was and is part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, World War II began in September, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland.

I had, when I was eighteen, worked for the government for ten months. So they had my name on a civil service list. I received a telegram offering me a clerical job in the Department of National Defense in Ottawa. I had already decided that soon everybody would be involved. So, since I was nearsighted even then, and wore glasses, I accepted the job, and arrived in Ottawa in November, 1939.

On the day of arrival, I read in the newspaper that there were only fourteen unrented apartments available in the entire city. So when somebody told me about a

two-bedroom apartment for \$75, I rushed over and immediately rented it.

What is significant about that action is that my monthly pay was \$81.

In these days of inflation, we don't realize that people used to live on incomes as low as \$60 a month. So there I was, in my fancy apartment, with \$6 a month left over from my salary — for food, furniture, utilities, clothes, and other expenses.

These days, when I look back, I'm somewhat astonished. Consciously, it didn't bother me at all. At the time, I took my situation so completely for granted that I didn't think my attitude was particularly unusual. I was a writer. I had it figured out. Dinner was ready. I ate. Then I took a twenty-minute nap. And then I wrote one of my 800-word scenes for a story. That took until about 11:00 p.m. And then I went to bed.

On Saturdays, government people worked until 1:00 p.m. And so, in addition to my evenings, I had Saturday afternoons and all day Sunday. It was time enough. It was there — in that apartment — that I wrote *Slan*, my first science fiction novel, 70,000 words in length. Normally, at the regular rate of 1¢ a word, which was what *Astounding Science Fiction* paid in those days, I would have received \$700. But John W. Campbell, Jr. gave me a bonus. I was paid \$835.

There's no question in my mind: I could have kept going like that for the rest of the war. But, unfortunately, a war is not reliable; it cannot be depended upon. Early in 1941, I was suddenly requested to work two evenings a week, without extra pay. Then four evenings a week. Then all day Saturday. Then every other Sunday. Suddenly, I was tired. During my off hours, I slept a lot. Story writing came to a dead stop.

I realized that I was doomed. So I quit my job. By coincidence, I quit one month before all government employees were frozen in their jobs for the duration of the war.

It was late May, 1941. I rented a cottage in the Gatineau Hills in Quebec for the summer. It was there that I wrote some of my best early stories, including *The Weapon Shop* and the first *Rull* story.

At the end of the summer, I moved to

Toronto, lived for a while in a duplex in the suburbs, and then made the down payment on a small house. It was in that house, in Toronto, in 1943, that I discovered the method which was the source of my creative ability. Until that time, I attributed my success entirely to my 800-word scene, each with its five steps, and to my method of writing in what John Gallishaw, the originator of the 800-word scene, called "fictional sentences."

But unknowingly, I believe, I had been tapping my subconscious mind, where human creativity is actually located.

Here is what I was doing:

When you're writing, as I was, for 1¢ a word, and are a slow writer, and the story keeps stopping for hours or days, and your rent is due, you get anxious. However, I wasn't aware of the anxiety. I would wake up spontaneously at night, and without even realizing it for years, I'd think about story problems — and after a minute or so, back to sleep I went. In the morning, often, there would be an unusual solution. All my best plot twists came in this way.

As I've mentioned, it takes me a long time before I notice a pattern. So it was not until July, 1943, that I suddenly realized what I was doing.

That night, I got out our alarm clock. I set the alarm to ring in an hour-and-a-half. When it awakened me, I reset the alarm for another ninety minutes, thought about the problems in the story I was working on — and fell asleep.

I did that, altogether, four times during the night. And in the morning, I had come up with an unusual solution, the strange plot twist — exactly as when I had awakened from anxiety.

So I had my system for tapping my subconscious mind. During the next seven years, I awakened myself about 300 nights a year, four times a night.

Everything that one does with, or to, the mind has side effects. If you do crossword puzzles, you unknowingly increase your intelligence, according to the tests given these days. My method of contacting the subconscious through directed dreaming probably had a number of side effects. I believe it's the reason that occasionally I can be very humorous for a few hours. It doesn't happen often, but it started back in

Ottawa in 1940, and occurs every few years. My guess is that my continuous contacting of the subconscious opens up a channel that is normally blocked by miles of conditioning. But I have no system for that yet. It just happens.

In 1948, Simon and Shuster published my science fiction novel, *The World of Null-A*. The editor who was appointed to supervise its publication, sent me twenty single-spaced pages of suggestions for changes. It was all new to me, and I had no systematic thought about dealing with editors. So I did all the changes without argument. Most of the changes involved eliminating General Semantics ways of saying things, and of substituting standard English.

The editor was an English major, meaning a person who had made a specialty of the English language in its traditional form, and he felt that the General Semantics forms of English should not be overdone.

I eventually discovered that English majors of that period were generally resistant to Korzybski's ideas about the uses of the English language. So, perhaps, that was this editor's problem, too. But it is, in fact, difficult to know exactly how much of a new idea should be used during a transition period. For an editor in a big publishing company, it could be that he was very tolerant.

Somewhere in the mid-1940s, I noticed that I was no longer reading my one-time favorite author, A. Merritt. He was the author of *The Moon Pool*, *Creep*, *Shadow*, and other masterpieces of macabre science fiction. In my slow fashion, I started to think about that. And, presently I came up with an observation which — I'm sure — most of you have also had — namely, there comes a time when a writer goes out of style.

I decided it was a ten-year cycle. During the initial ten years of a writer's career, he belongs. He fits in. He identifies with the people he grew up with. He thinks the way his generation thinks. To him, his parents are old-fashioned people who read old-fashioned books, and have old-fashioned minds. He reflects the consciousness of that ten-year period. I call it the "current quaint reality."

When the ten-year cycle has run its

course, all artistic people, but particularly writers, would be well-advised to take notice. There's a new generation coming up from below. They read him in their late teens, and that's old-style to them, now. They have a new understanding, a new dynamic feeling, a new "current quaint reality."

What to do? How to prevent that from happening to me? In 1947, I took a first, tentative step, in that I started to write a book on hypnotism for a psychologist. It was eventually published under the title, *The Hypnotism Handbook*, and is still in print in the United States, though it was never translated into any European languages.

In order to write that book, I went with the psychologist to lectures and demonstrations he gave. I attended his classes for medical doctors who, at that time, were thinking of using hypnotism in childbirth. I was eventually an early-stage subject at these classes.

At the time, I still believed that writing a book fitted with my theory of doing things professionally. So I was involved in research for such a book. It was my first step in the direction of studying human nature other than through reading books about it. I had read more than 100 books on psychology. And I was confused, because there were so many schools promoting contradictory ideas.

I was in this frame of mind when, in early 1950, my friend, L. Ron Hubbard, began to phone me long distance from New York, urging me to get involved in his newly discovered system of psychological therapy, called "dianetics." He had sent me an advance copy; and what he had to say fitted in with what I had observed in my study of hypnotism. In the book, he noted that people are in a state of hypnosis all their lives, and need to be de-hypnotized. He phoned me every morning for seventeen days in a row. On the seventeenth morning, he said that there were many people in California who wanted to send money, and there was no one to send it to; so I said, "All right, Ron, tell them to send it to me, and I'll guard it for you."

Three days later, I received an airmail letter appointing me to be head of the California dianetic foundation. It turned out to

be quite an experience, and I have never regretted my sudden feeling that this was probably my chance to study human behavior in a direct way.

Those early dianetic organizations lasted less than a year. I had the interesting experience of watching half a million dollars dwindle to nothing. All across the country, the Hubbard dianetic foundations went into bankruptcy. I didn't want to be involved in a bankruptcy. So the foundation lawyer and I went to see the creditors. At our urging, the creditors agreed to accept their share of the remaining assets. So we, in California, were the only dianetic foundation that did not go into bankruptcy.

For several months after that, I labored under the illusion that I had now made my study of human behavior. I actually went back into writing. I wrote a long novelette, *Fulfillment*, for an anthology, *New Adventures in Time and Space*. I was planning to get back into writing full-time, when it was pointed out to me that being in charge of the administrative department of a mental institution doesn't make you a psychiatrist.

This statement, as it related to my administrative role, started me thinking and out of that came a professional thought. I decided to rent a twelve-room house, and start a dianetic center. The lease was for three years. Once I began to deal with human beings, I soon got involved. What had been intended to be a three-year study, lasted nearly nine years.

During that time, in 1958, to be exact, I published one new science fiction novel, *The Mind Cage*. Anthony Boucher criticized it as having in it all my worst stereotypes. I now think he was wrong, but at the time he convinced me that I still had not broken out of my ten-year cycle. There were, though, some productive writing results. During my dianetic look at human behavior, I noticed the characteristics of the type of person I call the "violent male." And as a result, in my spare moments, I wrote a non-science fiction novel about Red China, which was published in 1962 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux as a hardcover, titled *The Violent Man*.

Colin Wilson, the brilliant British Existentialist writer, has written that this study

— of the man who feels so right that he is entitled to hit and hurt — will win me a niche eventually in the "psychological hall of fame." Unfortunately, the book didn't do well as a hardcover, but it has seen many paperback printings, and was re-issued in 1978 by Pocketbooks, one of the leading American paperback publishers.

Another outcome was my systematic thought about women. In writing *The Violent Man*, I described the behavior of the two principal women in it. I simply detailed what I had seen two women do in life situations without understanding why they did it. So during the next several years, I asked about 300 men and women how they would explain what those two women did.

To date, I have written two stories incorporating a small part of my resulting systematic thought about women. Part appeared in a novelette, *The Sound of Wild Laughter*, in a collection titled *Pendulum* (Daw), and another part in its sequel, a novel, *The Secret Galactics*, republished as *Earth Factor X* (Daw). It took one book, *The Violent Man*, to describe men — who are after all simple creatures emotionally — but I estimate it will take four more novels to dramatize my complete system on women.

1958 proved to be a seminal year for me. In that year, I learned that three men I had gone to school with had all become wealthy. So I tried to recall what they were like in their teens. In 1973, I published a non-fiction book, *The Money Personality*. It described, and listed, the twelve qualities one must have in order to make and keep money.

As you can see, my writing pattern is based upon extensive research: *The Hypnotism Handbook*, *The Violent Man*, and *The Money Personality*. This study of human behavior — spanning nearly twelve years, was an outgrowth of my professional approach.

Two other systems grew out of my dianetic study. One, a method of dream therapy, involved a technique whereby I would awaken myself every hour-and-a-half, for the purpose of eliminating emotional difficulties. For this, I didn't use an alarm clock. Instead, I used an industrial timer, which turned on a cassette recorder

on which I had recorded a few sentences to awaken me and remind me of the problem I was trying to work out.

My other system was a therapeutic approach to exercise, which is too complicated to explain here.

With both of these, all I've done so far literary-wise is write a pamphlet on each, largely for copyright purposes.

One day, while walking the dog, I had the thought: Why don't I try to learn various foreign languages during these walks? So I bought several language records, transcribed them onto regular tape, and from there onto cassettes, so I could carry the language with me.

I quickly discovered that none of those commercial systems was suitable for teaching languages while walking rapidly. So I spend a lot of time with two tape recorders, working out a system that was suitable. However, it took too many hours of my time just to organize the material so that I could learn a language while walking rapidly. So, finally, in February, 1974, I placed an advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times*, which read: "Writer wants, for non-commercial taping, people who speak Frisian, Flemish, Low German, Yiddish, Basque, Raeto-Romanic, and Walloon. Will pay \$10 an hour."

Why did I ask for dialects and languages which are normally only of regional interest? Well, my dog and I didn't care what languages we learned. And, second, I had often wondered what such languages were like.

A Frisian woman, a Flemish professor, a Low German speaking architect, and a young man who spoke Raeto-Romanic came and recorded material for me on my equipment. I was, however, still not thinking professionally. As I've mentioned, I'm slow.

Suddenly, a few months later, came the professional thought. I decided that there were probably 200 languages available in the Los Angeles area, so I set up what I called the "200 Language Club," began to advertise in a national literary magazine, and searched for people who could speak various foreign languages. And, naturally, when they showed up, I took them to a professional recording studio and signed contracts with them.

Unfortunately, I can't devote too much time to it. But with the help of a part-time secretary, I now have a going business in language teaching by my copyrighted method. Recently, a New York publisher signed a contract with me, and has started promoting my High German, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Russian tapes all over the country. It's quite interesting that, until now, they have been promoting the tapes devised by the U.S. State Department to teach their foreign service people other languages.

As soon as I have more time, I plan to go on radio and television, and really search for unusual dialects and languages, which I believe are available in the Los Angeles area.

Now, how come that I, who have no formal scientific training, could come up with systems of that order? I attribute it to: (1) automatic consciousness expansion from reading and writing science fiction, and (2) to persistence.

I stay with an idea. The months go by, and I am still revising it, and watching it. The person who works from an advance outline doesn't do that. While working out my story, I gradually work out the ideas in it, too.

A few years ago, I had occasion to reread a minor short story of mine, titled "Film Library," which was published in *As-tounding* in 1946. I had completely forgotten — until I reread the story — that in it I provided a pretty good description of the transistor. So far as I know, that was years before it was invented.

In rereading the story, I was able to recall what led to my science fictional invention. My main character had one of those tiny wrist radios, so common in early science fiction, but which no one ever tried to explain. I remember thinking in 1946: I wonder how such a device would work? And my mind went off, meaning back in time, to the early crystal radio sets — before there was ever a vacuum tube. In doing so, I decided: communication science is not yet through with the crystal.

So I wrote the following, printed, as I've said, in 1946 — the July issue:

"... a radio that was simply a bracelet made of what was called 'sensitive metal.' The crystalline structure of the sensitivity

was shown, and also the radio waves were shown, transformed into sound by ultrathin bubbles in the metal . . . ”

In the same story, there is a description of a film distribution system, which seems to be operated entirely by a computer, untouched by human hands. Records kept. Payment transfers made. Everything done electronically.

This brings me to the only film script I have written on assignment — and to the future world of computers operating on a level far beyond what is known at present.

On the basis of my work, Roger Corman, head of New World Pictures, authorized me in 1977 to write a script, originally titled, “Computerworld,” and since changed to “Conflict 2100.” When the story opens, the computer has been running America for many years. It flies all planes, drives all cars, runs all factories, answers all phones, etc., etc., etc.

It can write stories, songs, music. It puts on plays that it wrote and for which it provides actors’ images and for which it speaks all the lines.

The computer does require some maintenance. For this, Congress has provided a military service, which devotes itself exclusively to that one job. Computer Central is located in the City of Washington, D.C. And it is there, one day — when the story opens — after some new equipment has been added to the computer’s national hookup (the equipment is called “biomagnetic”) . . . it is there that the computer quite accidentally shows two scientists of the computer corps that, when they are observed by way of the new bio-magnetic system, their bodies look like configurations of golden balls. Or, at least, something inside the body has that configuration appearance.

This prompts one of the scientists to exclaim, in effect, “Good God, is it possible that for the first time ever we are looking at the human soul?”

The other scientist is outraged. “Are you out of your mind?” he says. “If the chief ever hears that you made an unscientific comment like that, you’d be out on your ear immediately.”

In all those years when I was letting my subconscious bounce around within the frame of this story or that story, I often

thought: Will I ever come up with anything — even one little thing — about what preceded the Big Bang? It was as I was contemplating some of the possibilities for ending “Computerworld,” that I finally got my first inkling about that: What came before the Big Bang — along with the universe — was a “Thought Configuration.”

As you may observe, that’s a pretty abstract concept. But it’s the first idea that I ever had. I immediately began telling other people about the idea. And among my hearers was a friend of mine, whom I see only occasionally, a professor of surgical medicine at the University of South Carolina. It was during a luncheon when he came to town. And he, at once, suggested a new aspect. He said, “Why not a ‘Goal-Seeking Thought Configuration?’ ”

There I was, hoping to add something that would make possible a whole series of special effects for the end of my story, and he gave it to me with that one question. I immediately had the farthest out ending for a story that I have even conceived. I showed the results to a computer engineer friend of mine. He came over a few evenings later and talked to me for three hours, pointing out how my ending could be fitted into the computer situation. That toned it down a bit, but when that Goal-Seeking Thought Configuration comes to its moment of fruition, I can tell you that it’s pretty far out. I hope they can do it.

In the past few years, I have published three new novels. One, titled *The Anarchistic Colossus*, presents my views on what kind of technology it will take to make anarchism work. The historical anarchists believed that human nature could be sufficiently changed so that a policeless, governmentless state would eventually work all by itself. My story accepts that human nature has existed a long time, and has needed all the help it can get.

My novel, *Renaissance*, published by Pocketbooks, includes the idea of innumerable miniscule implants in the body augmenting the power of a human being — I showed this to an electronic genius in the field before publication, and he felt it could all be done right now.

The third novel is the only recent work (in many years) that I have allowed to be published in hardcover. It’s a small

attempt at a romance; and in order to achieve that effect, I set the scene in the time of England's Queen Anne — my favorite queen of British history. In order to make the story science fictional, I came up with one of my mightiest concepts: the entire universe of time and space collapses into the year 1704 A.D., and we see a mixing of a pirate captain (a former British nobleman) confronting super-beings from other periods of history. Since it was not a scientific age, I inserted the science essentially from the author's point of view — skillfully done, I believe.

The title of this third novel, published by Doubleday, is *Cosmic Encounter*.

I also wrote a number of short pieces. One that comes to mind is a sort of "sword and sorcery" tale for Robert Asprin's second, *Thieves World* — actually titled, *Tales From the Vulgar Unicorn*. My story

was called, "The Dream of the Sorceress." I enjoyed doing it, since it was a new form for me.

My long-standing interest in languages had one outstanding side effect. In October, 1979, I married for a second time — my first wife passed away in January, 1975. The new lady is a Superior Court interpreter for five languages, principally Russian.

She wants me to do screenplays of my stories; and it may well be that with her determination pushing me, I shall really start devoting time to the screenplay form.

I must say, I wouldn't mind being a tried-and-true professional screenwriter, meaning, of course, someone who can do it every time . . . professionally. ●

intercom

Intercom seeks letters discussing ideas expressed in articles or fiction on our pages: or something that may be of general interest to our readers.

Dear Elinor:

I got a weird feeling reading Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" column in the Nov., 1981 issue on the same day that I received a contract for the publication of a story in which all the white characters are purposely stereotypical caricatures. (*Editor's Note: he refers to his story, "The Rape of Things to Come," in this issue.*) I hope they remember how to laugh. Honest folks, no offense was meant. Besides, some of my best friends are white . . .

In the meantime I'm glad to see that *Amazing* is leading the way in presenting alternatives to the usual adventures of white, male, all-American galactic go-getters who always solve whatever problem their latest assignment from the Galactic Bureau of Whatever has presented

them with (and get the girl) before the final paragraph. In the November issue we have a Japanese future (I'm becoming more impressed with Somtow Sucharitkul all the time), a Mexican experiment (even though I enjoyed "Up Yours, Federico" — turned tables and evened odds always amuse me — I don't like to see things like bullfighting put down from the point of view of a superior American culture that kills its cows and bulls behind closed doors with sledge hammers; I had a long, outrageous rant dreamed up, but I'm saving it to use as the germ of an sf story in defense of bullfighting. Ole', the always unique Moderan, an Australian freeway epic, a magnificent plague of butterflies (dragons, yes, but not Joe Typical Eurofantasy), galactic low-life, a non-corporate alternative and some Jewish mythology. It goes to prove that the more varied the cultural input, the more interesting, thought-provoking and entertaining the fiction!

As usual, the art was sensational. Especially the cover (Rowena Morrill makes

Frank Frazetta, Boris Vallejo and the Brothers Hildenbrandt look like a bunch of unimaginative cliché-mongers) and Gary Freeman's illoes for "The Last Line of the Haiku" (that back cover could have been used as a front cover).

Now I can see if the thunderstorms have washed that sticky layer of malathion off everything, wonder if the electricity will be cut off again, be glad I use a manual typewriter and anxiously wait for the next issue.

Ernestly,
Ernest Hogan,
West Covina, CA

Dear Editor:

I was rereading my September 1981 issue of *Amazing* when I happened to notice Barry Malzberg's letter. I just had to write to reveal how excited that I am that a writer of such considerable achievement as Barry Malzberg would take the time to praise a talented beginner like John Steakley. I might add that I share Barry's enthusiasm over John Steakley's remarkable story, "The Blue-Nose Limit," and his promise as a growing science fiction author in general. I fully agree that in another time, and under different circumstances, that piece of writing would have made John Steakley famous overnight and would have been anthologized for the next thirty years. Too bad such things just don't happen today — John Steakley deserves such acclaim.

There are successful writers like Barry — and I've met a few — who are very jealous and would never heap praise on a talented beginner. I guess they are afraid of the competition, or some such nonsense. The writing field is surely big enough to absorb those talented and dedicated enough to work for recognition, i.e. publication. And I really hope more people like Barry and John make their appearance in the months and years ahead. I like to think nice, friendly, generous people occupy the creative high places of my favorite genre — which is, it goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway) science fiction and fantasy. Gail Habbyslaw
Mercer, PA

*Malzberg is indeed both a talented and generous man who is always busy behind the scenes helping and encouraging new writers. And watch for a new novel (to be previewed in *Amazing*) by John Steakley.*
—EM

Dear Elinor,

You have proven yourself to be a queen amongst editors. I am referring to your beautiful note of 3/15/81. I herewith apologize for all the nastiness in my letter and thank you for all the niceness in yours. Elinor, yer the best. Even better than old Omar (former editorial pseudonym).

But onto more pertinent things, namely your July issue. In many ways it is the best issue you've yet produced. Malzberg's editorial was true. I haven't read the Adams piece because I hate excerpts. I wish you would cut them out. The Zelazny tale proved to me once again that I don't like Zelazny. It failed the "So what" test. "Namesake" also made no sense. It seems to me that some of my short-shorts that you've rejected made more sense than this.

Hooray for Ova Hamlet! I never realized how much I missed the old biddy from the White days. Now that you've got her, Elinor, don't let her go! This story had personal meaning for me because the Gor books disgust me. Lupoff gave them what they deserved in this tale. I just wish that John Norman would get what Norm John-nan got!

"Timestopper" was good for a few yucks. But what really made the issue for me was "Last Contact." The most frightening thing about this story, for me, was the thought that this could happen. As a matter of fact, could already have happened! Kelley deserves applause for coming up with one of the greatest and truest fantasy ideas yet in your magazine.

The Wightman piece was dull. I have told you in a previous letter my feelings about Wightman. Why not get a story by one of your really good writers, Paul Dellinger?

In the White days, *Amazing* had the best letter page of any prozine. Your letter page now is pretty good, though I think it should be longer. Some of your letters are very

amusing, such as the one by J.S. Fischer, containing one of the most ludicrous statements I have ever read (the one about Parke Godwin and the fate of *Galileo* and *Fantastic*). I suggest Fischer clears up his misconceptions about *Star Trek* by reading Ted White's editorial in the April, 1972 issue of *Fantastic*. You know, one of the magazines Parke Godwin supposedly destroyed. This editorial explains, in extruciating detail, WHY *Star Trek* was bad. You know, thinking about old Ted makes me think that you should start writing editorials, Elinor.

Another stupid letter was Ackerman's missive. Forget about sci-fi! Use sf. Your readers probably are more familiar with this term as it pertains to *quality* science fiction, not the kind of monster movie schlock that Jim Warren and Ackerman push in "Famous Monster" magazine. I couldn't believe it when I saw Ackerman use this position on FM as part of his credentials to put down Norman Spinrad and make him look like a fool.

In conclusion, Ms. Mavor, I must salute you. You constantly produce the most top-rate sf prozine in the world. If you don't win the editor Hugo this year, there is no justice in fandom.

Well, until next issue arrives and I send you another letter, I remain,

Brian Doherty
Jacksonville, Fl. 32217

If you really get what my editorial position is all about (and I do like the praise), you will realize that I feel there is room for a great deal of diversity in magazines, opinions, sf, people, films, etc., and I don't mind showcasing all facets of same, to entertain, provoke, stimulate, or whatever. I don't believe one's denunciation of something necessarily devaluates it. Not at all. But one's right to hail or denounce remains.—EM

Dear Ms. Mavor:

I have recently read the last three issues of *Amazing* close together and would like to congratulate you on a distinct improvement. It's still not in a league with the other

major zines, but if you can maintain the upward curve it will be.

Nonfiction tends to a fannish amateurishness, particularly in the interviews and Staicar's reviews. At least Fahnstalk's gone; I'd like to see fandom material, but done by someone better. The stories, aside from novel excerpts, perhaps (I don't read them — prefer to wait for the whole thing), are not memorable, and a few real horrors slither in (notably the inane Stine and sloppy Anker stories in May). On the other hand, most of the stuff keeps me reading, the humor tends to be decent (more Ova Hamlet!), the art is fine (your Sept. cover is worth 500 of the monstrosities now disfiguring *IASFM* and *Analog*), and the minority of Random Thoughts that work for me make up for the failures, which after all don't take up terribly much room.

The last time I renewed, it was as a gesture of faith, of hope that the noticeable improvements in a still-lousy magazine, would continue. The next renewal time, I expect to renew because the mag is really worth it. (I sub to no other zine, except for an unexpired *F&SF* sub, because the labels can't be removed without ruining the cover. I hope you get big enough again to use mechanically-printed labels, but I also hope you'll find a source of removable ones.)

Praise HERBIE,

Philip M. Cohen
Aliquippa, PA

Dear Ms. Mavor,

I've just renewed my magazine sub. for three years and since I've been reading *A.S.F.* since 1976 I thought I would also include this note.

First thing: your magazine doesn't need "pure science" features. Send those guys to *Asimov's* and *Analog*.

Secondly, *A.S.F.* doesn't need Mr. R. Silverberg's "Sterling" opinions.

Also, why have the "In This Issue" overview? I look through the magazine as soon as I get it, but *always* end up reading cover to cover anyway. You've wasted some ink.

Book reviews: good. Don't use any

more space for them. Two and a half pages is just right.

'Intercom': Super. 'Nuf said.

Poems and Verse: Love it! Why not use these if you really need filler?

Stories and Pix: Absolutely my favorite for the five years I've been reading. Please, continue these features I enjoy most!

You know, since you've taken the helm, A.S.F. has had a bright & fresh outlook. I suppose the neat covers are the reason!

Stacy J. Litherland
Shererville, IN

As I said, we'll air a wide variety of opinion to stimulate dialogue. Detractors like Cohen and Litherland who never-the-less subscribe AND read every word are a mystery — but a happy one.—EM

Dear Mr. Dettling:

I read your piece, "The Incredible Communications Revolution," in the September *Amazing*, and just wanted you to know how much I enjoyed it. It was the most interesting and skillfully written piece I have ever seen on the subject.

Scott DeGarmo
Science Digest
New York, NY

SD/mv

Dettling is currently developing a series of science articles for another editor at Science Digest.—EM

Dear Elinor,

Your rejection slip asks for comments on the magazine. As far as the September issue goes — I thought the artwork, both front and back cover, was excellent. I'd like to see more artwork, if it has this quality, inside. Of the stories, I was most taken with the Pronzini-Malzberg piece. In addition to encouraging you to continue to publish sf/speculative verse, I'd also like to see you keep the Hall of Fame as a feature, particularly if you can fill it with stories as good as the one by Ellison. Here's hoping

that *Amazing/Fantastic* has a long life in its new incarnation.

Bruce Boston
El Cerrito, CA

Dear Elinor,

Congratulations on a fine September issue, which is probably the best issue you guys have put out since the combination of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. The excerpt from *Madwand* was excellent (I usually don't like excerpts, but this read like a self contained story), as was "Harmless Illusions." "The Foxworth Legatees" was good, but just below the other two.

The best part of your last few issues has been the excellent essays by Robert Silverberg (my favorite author). For instance, his May essay (the worse something is, the more people buy it) could explain your relatively low circulation figures. After all, isn't *Amazing* the best?

The only complaint I have is the merger (elimination) of *Fantastic*. With the field of magazine sf shrinking every day, the loss of a high quality magazine hurts all sf fans.

So, please, Elinor, try to either make *Amazing* a monthly, or reconstitute both magazines as bi-monthly magazines.

Best always,

Karl T. Heck
E. Syracuse, N.Y.

What is affecting the magazine market is probably the same thing that is affecting everything right now — an economic slowdown. If we could afford to let more people know about us with promotion equal to that of our much larger competitors, I feel we would have comparable circulation and would be able to answer all of your (and our) wishes for the magazine.—EM ●

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

Tom Staicar

Gregg Press Science Fiction Series: The Works of Fritz Leiber.

Fritz Leiber is a towering giant among the writers of the literature of the fantastic. Some writers can produce hard-science novels, others can write horror novels, and still others can write popular heroic fantasy stories. Only Fritz Leiber can span the entire range of all of these and win awards for excellence while producing acknowledged classics. The Hugo, the Nebula, the awards of the World Fantasy Convention, and other accolades crowd his shelves, garnered during a career he chose to spend writing the types of stories he loves. There is ample evidence to suggest that the worlds of sf, fantasy and horror are not worthy of his talents. During some phases of his career he was sadly and unfairly relegated to low-paying markets in obscure fields such as magazine serializations for a few hundred dollars and paperback originals which offered no advances to speak of. Leiber's books stand out like bright gems among the average potboilers generated to pay the rent by the category novelists of the fifties and sixties, but recognition and remuneration were years in coming for him.

Gregg Press has wisely decided to publish a selection of the best of Fritz Leiber's works in its series of hardcover, deluxe bound volumes of sf and fantasy classics. Each book contains a definitive version of a Leiber work, along with a new introduction specially written for the book.

The titles available from Gregg Press include: *The Wanderer*, *The Sinful Ones*, *Conjure Wife*, *The Book of Fritz Leiber Vol. I and II*, *The Worlds of Fritz Leiber*, *Night's Black Agents*, *The Green*

Millennium, *The Big Time*, *The Change War*, *Gather, Darkness!*, and *The Fahrd and Gray Mouser Saga: Swords and Deviltry, Swords Against Death, Swords in the Mist, Swords Against Wizardry, The Swords of Lankmar, and Swords and Ice Magic*. I urge you to send for the free brochure which describes this important series (send to: Gregg Press SF, B.K. Hall & Co., 70 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111). If you are a Leiber fan, or merely a reader of fantasy or sf who appreciates the highest quality writing in those fields, you will be unable to resist ordering one or more titles. I further urge you to fill out a patron suggestion-for-purchase form at your local library.

The writing Leiber did in *Conjure Wife* is equal to the best of the modern supernatural horror novels. In it, Norman Saylor happens to find out that his wife Tansy is practicing witchcraft to protect him from the evil spells directed toward him by the spiteful, ambitious denizens of their small college town. He finds to his terror that Tansy was protecting him from deadly danger all along as one pulse-pounding crisis after another pursues him. He meanwhile struggles with his own belief in the rational impossibility of the existence of witchcraft in the real world.

The *Fahrd* and *Gray Mouser* tales represent the first true improvement of the heroic fantasy genre since Howard pioneered in the form. The sophistication and humor of the two introspective and intelligent heroes contrasts sharply with the bloody and violent deeds of Conan. Where Conan would bash heads to escape a predicament, Leiber's heroic pair must think their way out of trouble.

These are only two of the Leiber works available in the Gregg series. Leiber has given us many hours of reading pleasure through the years and it is time we gave him our full support and well-earned praise.

Ellison Reads Ellison. This is the first long-playing record available from The Harlan Ellison Record Collection (to join, send \$5.00 to: 420 South Beverly Drive, Suite 207, Beverly Hills, CA 90212). The album contains (barely!) the emotional and

highly dramatic reading, by the writer himself, of "Shatterday" and "Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktockman.'" Fans of old-time radio drama, and those who have been hooked by Ellison's brand of magic realism, will be delighted with the contents of this record. Members also receive *Rabbit Hole*, the newsletter of the club. It contains news of the works-in-progress and lecture itinerary of fantasy's most energetic and peripatetic phenomenon. Join the club and be prepared for voice characterizations and acting which bring new dimensions to the works of Harlan Ellison.

Weird Tales #3 edited by Lin Carter (Zebra Books, \$2.50). *Weird Tales* is back! Lin Carter's perseverance has borne fruit as he has now been able to continue the "Unique Magazine" in a mass market paperback format. The first three contain all new stories by Ramsey Campbell, Manly Wade Wellman and other masters, along with the resurrected "Eyre" (letter column), and some classic reprints by Robert E. Howard and Evangeline Walton. Look for the new *Weird Tales* among the paperbacks rather than at the magazine racks. A very welcome sight!

Strange Tales and Mystery Adventure are two of the reprint books published by Odyssey Publications (P.O. Box 71, Melrose Highlands, MA 02177). For \$5.00 each you can own facsimiles of the early pulp stories of Jack Williamson, Edmond Hamilton, and others. These are representative samples of the contents of issues which cost a lot of money in their original form.

The Wonderful Lips of Thibong Linh by Theodore Roscoe (Donald M. Grant, West Kingstown, RI, \$15.00) is a collection of novellas by a lesser-known writer whose works once graced the pages of *Argosy*, *Adventure*, and *Weird Tales*. His colorful and exotic Oriental settings are illustrated by the excellent artist Stephen Gervais, whose work compliments Roscoe's very well.

Lord of the Dead by Robert E. Howard is the latest addition to the canon of Robert

E. Howard to be published by Donald M. Grant in deluxe hardcover form. Patterned after Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Manchu, the evil villain Erlik Khan menaces the hero. In the pre-Pearl Harbor days of the Howard stories, Americans were apparently willing to accept anything told to them, about the people of Asia. Some have contended that the Yellow Peril pulp stories reflected the attitudes that allowed Americans to accept war with Japan more readily than war with Germany. Howard and others were concerned more with entertainment than politics, but their stories did reflect the racism and mood of the times.

H.P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism edited by S. T. Joshi (Ohio University Press, \$15.00) is a collection of articles about HPL drawn from many sources. These deal with Lovecraft's early influences, the HPL circle of writer-correspondents which included Leiber, Bloch, and Frank Belknap Long, and the writings of the influential author.

Twentieth-Century American Science Fiction Writers: Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 8, Part 1 and 2. (Gale Research Co., Detroit, \$124.00 a set). Although priced out of reach for most people, this is a set which should be purchased by all libraries. Ninety sf writers are the subject of expertly-written articles, illustrated with photos and facsimile manuscript pages in this large hardcover set. Previous volumes covered post-World War II poets, the American Renaissance in New England, and other literary topics. To have sf honored in this manner shows how far we have all come. Asimov, Sturgeon, LeGuin, Dick, Farmer, and many others are given careful attention by academic writers in this indispensable reference work. Sections on sf media, awards, fandom, and trends add depth to this set which provides fascinating reading and a wealth of information.

Science Fiction Voices #3 by Jeffrey Elliot. (Borgo Press, Box 2845, San Bernardino, CA 92406, hardcover \$8.95; paperback \$2.95). Jeffrey Elliot is the best interviewer working in sf today. To prepare

for his hundreds of interviews for this book and others (such as *Literary Voices #1*), Dr. Elliot reads all the works by and about his subjects. Asimov, Silverberg and Heinlein would stop most people right there! His conversations with top names in sf are enjoyable to read for pleasure and are of historic value for the future. Borgo also has published a number of studies of sf writers' works, among them the recent books on Colin Wilson, J.G. Ballard, Philip Wylie, and James Blish, in its Milford Series (same price as above). These merit your attention.

Anatomy of Wonder: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction. *Second Edition.* edited by Neil Barron. (Bowker, hardcover \$32.95; trade paperback \$22.95). If you only own one book about sf, this should be the one. The first edition of this landmark reference work has been completely revised and augmented. Use it to find out what the books in sf are about, which have won awards, and which represent the best or most noteworthy titles in each of sf's historical eras. Some books belong on a shelf until needed but *Anatomy of Wonder* will spend more time off the shelf than on it as readers use it again and again.

Horror Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide edited by Marshall Tymn (Bowker, hardcover \$29.95; trade paperback \$19.95). A companion volume to Barron's book, *Horror Literature* covers the history contents, and publication dates of the major and minor works of horror of the past century. Tymn is an expert at compiling such reference works and this is one of his best.

Last Communion by Nicholas Yermakov (Signet, \$2.25). Shelby Michaels is a pilot who makes contact with a powerful alien mind. Her space voyage loneliness is shattered by a sort of Mr. Spock mind-meld with an entire civilization of the alien Shades, several of whom begin to dwell within her overloaded mind at one time. Their entire history and racial memories are present in a gestalt and Shelby is overwhelmed. Her life, career, and sex-life are

altered.

Nicholas Yermakov has taken the familiar sf situation of the intrepid survey team's first contact with aliens, and has added character depth and philosophical musings to the mixture. In control all the way, Yermakov subtly and then dramatically changes the characters by having outside forces act upon their fears, pride, weakness and strength. Yermakov is near the beginning of what promises to be a major career in sf.

The Psycho-Technic League by Poul Anderson (Tor Books, Pinnacle, \$2.50). is part of the future history stories which follow the agents of the United Nations on a quest to find a way of achieving world peace after a nuclear war. Space colonization and terraforming of planets does little to end the conflicts which face free people in Poul Anderson's future world. Anderson explains in his foreword that his U.N. was based on the old one which preceded the domination by the Third World terrorists and Soviet bloc nations which have tended to nullify the usefulness of the world body today, in the view of many observers. A world united in one assembly where talking is the alternative to war has not become a reality through the U.N. but this does not diminish the value of Anderson's stories.

Tor also publishes *Fantasy and Winners* by Poul Anderson, the former a collection of his non-sf and the latter a selection of award-winning fiction.

The City of the Singing Flame by Clark Ashton Smith (Pocket Timescape, \$2.95) is the first in a much-needed series of uniform paperback editions of the incomparable fantasies of Smith, whose work has influenced Ellison, Leiber, and many others. In the title story, an average man steps through a portal in a countryside and enters a world in another dimension. Giants and unimaginably alien creatures of various types gather around a giant flame which sends a haunting siren song to all within hearing. Smith was a master at use of language to evoke strong visual images.

Distant Stars by Samuel R. Delany (Bantam trade paperback, \$8.95). Delany's taste and mine do not always coincide but *Distant Stars* is a fine collection which might serve as the best introduction to his work for those not yet familiar with it. "Time Considered As A Helix of Semi-Precious Stones" is included, as are his most recent tales and a novella called "Empire Star." The sixty pages of illustrations were carefully planned to add impact to the volume's text. A good selection by an intelligent writer whose vocabulary and stylistic techniques have earned him a reputation in speculative fiction.

Writer's Digest Books has just published three titles which will appeal to the many *Amazing* readers who are actively pursuing writing careers:

How To Write Best Selling Science Fiction by Dean R. Koontz (\$13.95) gives practical and tough-minded insights into the transition Koontz made from sf short story and novel author to mainstream suspense novelist. Koontz discusses his beginnings in sf and his experiences in writing such novels as *Whispers* (Pocket Books) which are sold right next to the cash register at places like B. Dalton's.

Creating Short Fiction by Damon Knight (\$11.95) is the distillation of Knight's knowledge gained from a decade of teaching fledgling sf writers at Clarion sessions and of reading manuscripts as a top editor. Damon Knight strikes me as a patient, caring, compassionate man who has given countless hours of his time to new writers. His book is a must-have for anyone who is interested in writing fiction. A valuable guide to the baffling and frustrating road toward professional publication.

Fiction Writer's Market (\$15.95) is a combination of market source (800 places to sell writing) and article collection. C.J. Cherryh writes on narrative, Stephen King on horror, Orson Scott Card on novels, and James Gunn on getting those crazy ideas onto paper. Much non-sf material and information on the mechanics of story submission to publishers is also included.

Staicar, 34, lives with his wife Joy in Ann Arbor, MI, where he is supervisor in the Interlibrary Loan Office and selector of sf acquisitions for the University of Michigan Graduate Library. An avid reader of sf since the age of 10, Staicar has written about it for such magazines as *Writer's Digest*, *Today's Student*, *Science Fiction Review* and *The Twilight Zone Magazine*. He was recently named *SF General Editor* for the *Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.'s* *Recognitions* series of books about science fiction. Ungar will also be publishing his book on Fritz Leiber. ●

HISTORY/HERSTORY

One of them — we don't know which — paints on cave walls.

He moulds bricks, mortars them, invents the arch.

She sweeps around him trailing ivy, laurel, grapevines, and plants a pomegranate.

He builds a wall; she undermines it with moles. A log cabin — termites.

He has stress and aspiration on his side. She has gravity — and faults.

While he works on the Tower of Babel she lolls around reading *Der Untergang des Abenlands* and spits pomegranate seeds.

He considers a space probe. She feels indigestion coming on and erupts.

Once in a while, they get together and make a rainbow.

—Ellin Carter





Illustrated by Skip Olson



HARLAN ELLISON

the cheese stands alone

CORT LAY WITH his eyes closed, feigning sleep, for exactly one hour after she had begun to snore. Every few minutes he would permit his eyes to open to slits, marking the passage of time on the luminous dial of his watch there on the nightstand. At five a.m. precisely he slipped out of the Olympic pool-sized motel bed, swept up his clothes from the tangled pile on the floor, and dressed quickly in the bathroom. He did not turn on the light.

Because he could not remember her name, he did not leave a note.

Because he did not wish to demean her, he did not leave a twenty on the nightstand.

Because he could not get away fast enough, he pushed the car out of the parking slot in front of the room and let it gather momentum down through the silent lot till it bumped out onto the street. Through the open window he turned the wheel, caught the door before the car began rolling backward, slid inside and only then started the engine.

Route 1 between Big Sur and Monterey was empty. The fog was up. Somewhere to his left, below the cliffs, the Pacific murmured threats like an ancient adversary. The fog billowed across the highway, conjuring ectoplasmic shapes in the foreshortened beams of his headlights. Moisture hung from the great,

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thick trees like silver memories of times before the coming of Man. The twisting coast road climbed through terrain that reminded him of Brazilian rain forest: mist-drenched and chill, impenetrable and aggressively ominous. Cort drove faster, daring disaster to catch up with him. There had to be more than the threat of the forest.

As there had to be more in this life than endodontics and income properties and guilt-laden late night frottage with sloe-eyed dental assistants. More than pewter frames holding diplomas from prestigious universities. More than a wife from a socially prominent family and 2.6 children who might fit a soap manufacturer's perfect advertising vision of all-American youth. More than getting up each morning to a world that held no surprises.

There had to be disaster somewhere. In the forest, in the fog, in the night. But not on Route 1 at half-past-five. Not for him, not right now.

By six-thirty he reached Monterey and realized he had not eaten since noon of the previous day when he had finished the root canal therapy on Mrs. Udall, had racked the drill, had taken off his smock and donned his jacket, had walked out of the office without a word to Jan or Alicia, had driven out of the underground garage and started up the Coast, fleeing without a thought to destination.

There had been no time for dinner when he'd picked up the cocktail waitress, and no late night pizza parlor open for a snack before she fell asleep. Acid had begun to burn a hole in his stomach lining from too much coffee and too little peace of mind.

He drove into the tourist center of Monterey and had no trouble finding a long stretch of open parking spaces. There was no movement along the shop-fronted sidewalks. The sun seemed determined never to come up. The fog was heavy and wet; streaming quicksand flowed around him. For a moment the windows of a shop jammed with driftwood-base lamps destined for Iowa basement rec rooms solidified in the eye of the swirling fog; then they were gone. But in that moment he saw his face in the glass. This night might stretch through the day.

He walked carefully through the streets, looking for an early morning dinette where he might have a Belgian waffle with frozen strawberries slathered in sugary syrup. An egg sunnyside up. *Something* sunny side up in this unending darkness.

Nothing was open. He thought about that. Didn't anyone go to work early in Monterey? Were there no businesses girding themselves for the locust descent of teenagers with rucksacks, corpulent business machine salesmen in crimson Budweiser caps, and Semitic widows with blue hair? Had there been an eclipse? Was this the shy, pocked, turned-away face of the moon? Where the hell was daylight?

Fog blew past him, parted in streamers for an instant. Down a side street he saw a light. Yellow faded as parchment, wan and timorous. But a light.

He turned down the side street and searched through the quicksilver for the source. It seemed to have vanished. Past closed bakeries and jewelry shops and scuba gear emporia. A wraith in the fog. He realized he moved through not only the empty town and through the swaddling fog, but through a condition of fear. *Gnotobiosis*: an environmental condition in which germfree animals have been inoculated with strains of known microorganisms. Fear.

The light swam up through the silent, silvered shadow sea; and he was right in front of it. Had he moved to it . . . had it moved to him?

It was a bookstore. Without a sign. And within, many men and women; browsing.

He stood in the darkness, untouched by the fallow light from the nameless bookshop, staring at the nexus. For such a small shop, so early in the morning, it was thronged. Men and women stood almost elbow to elbow, each absorbed in the book close at hand. *Gnotobiosis*: Cort felt the fear sliding through his veins and arteries like poison.

They were not turning the pages.

Had they not moved their bodies, a scratching at the lip, the blinking of eyes, random shifting of feet, a slouch, a straightening of back, a glance around . . . he would have thought them mannequins. A strange but interesting tableau to induce passersby to come in and also browse. They were alive, but they did not turn the pages of the books that absorbed them. Nor did they return a book to its shelf and take another. Each man, each woman: held fascinated by words where the books had been opened.

He turned to walk away as quickly as he could.

The car. Get on the road. There had to be a truck stop, a diner, a greasy spoon, fast food, anything. I've been here before, and *this isn't Monterey!*

The tapping on the window stopped him.

He turned back. The desperate expression on the tortoiselike face of the tiny old woman stiffened his back. He found his right hand lifting, as if to put itself between him and the sight of her. He shook his head no, definitely not, but he had no idea what he was rejecting.

She made staying motions with her wrinkled little hands and mouthed words through the glass of the shop window. She spoke very precisely and the words were these:

I have it here for you.

Then she motioned for him to come around to the door, to enter, to step inside: *I have it here for you.*

The luminous dial of his watch said 7:00. It was still night. Fog continued to pour down from the Monterey peninsula's forest.

Cort tried to walk away. San Francisco was up the line. The sun had to be blazing over Russian Hill, Candlestick Park, and Coit Tower. The world still held surprises. *You're loose now, you've broken the cycle*, he heard his future whisper. *Don't respond. Go to the sun.*

He saw his hand reach for the doorknob. He entered the bookshop.

They all looked up for a moment, registered nothing, the door closed behind him, they dropped their gazes to the pages. Now he was inside among them.

"I'm certain I have it in hardcover, a very clean copy," the little old turtle woman said. Her smile was toothless. *How could there be fog in here?*

"I'm just browsing," Cort said.

"Yes, of course," she said. "Everyone is just browsing."

She laid her hand on his arm and he shuddered. "Just till a restaurant opens."

"Yes, of course."

He was having trouble breathing. The heartburn. "Is it always . . . does it always stay dark so late into the morning here?"

"Unseasonal," she said. "Look around. I have it here for you. Exactly."

He looked around. "I'm not looking for anything special."

She walked with him, her hand on his arm. "Neither were they." She nodded at the crowd of men and women. "But they found answers here. I have a very fine stock."

No pages were turned.

He looked over the shoulder of a middle-aged woman staring intently at a book with steel engravings on both open pages. The turtle said, "Her curiosity was aroused by the question, 'How was the *first* vampire created?' Fascinating concept, isn't it? If vampires can only be created by a normal human being receiving the bite of a vampire, then how was the first one created? She has found the answer here in my wonderful stock." Cort stared at the book. One of the steel engravings was of Noah's ark.

But wouldn't that mean there had to be *two* on board?

The turtle drew him down the line of stacks. He paused behind a young man in a very tight T-shirt. He looked as if he had been working out. His head was bent so close to the open book in his hands that his straight blond hair fell over his eyes.

"For years he has felt sympathetic pains with an unknown person," the turtle confided. "He would sense danger, elation, lust, despair . . . none of his own making, and none having anything to do with his circumstance at that moment. Finally he began to realize he was linked with another. Like the Corsican Brothers. But his parents assured him he was an only child, there was no twin. He found the answer in this volume." She made shoo'ing motions with her blue-veined hands.

Cort peered around the young man's head and hair. It was a book on African history. There were tears in the young man's eyes; there was a spot of moisture on the verso. Cort looked away quickly; he didn't want to intrude.

Next in line was a very tall, ascetic looking man carefully holding a folio of pages that had obviously been written with a quill. By the flourishes and swirls of the writing, Cort knew the book had to be quite old and very likely valuable. The tortoise woman leaned in close, her head barely reaching Cort's chest, and she said, "Sixteenth century. First Shakespeare folio. This gentleman wandered through most of his adult life, and decades of academic pursuits, tormented by the question of who actually wrote *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*: the Bard or his rival, Anthony Munday. There lies his answer, before his eyes. I have such a superior stock."

"Why doesn't he . . . why don't any of these people turn the page?"

"Why bother? They've found the answer they sought."

"And there's nothing more they want to know?"

"Apparently not. Interesting, isn't it?"

Cort found it more chilling than interesting. Then the chill fastened itself permanently to his heart, like a limpet, with the unasked question, *How long have these browsers been here like this?*

"Here's a woman who always wanted to know if pure evil exists anywhere on the face of the earth." The woman wore a *mantilla* over her shoulders, and she stared mesmerized at a book on natural history. "This man hungered for a complete list of the contents of the great Library of Alexandria, the subject matters contained on those half million handwritten papyrus scrolls at the final moment before the Library was torched in the Fifth Century." The man was gray and wizened and his face had been incised with an expression of ancient weariness

that reminded Cort of Stonehenge. He pored over two pages set so closely with infinitesimal typefaces that Cort could not make out a single word in the fly-specks. "A woman who lost her memory," said the turtle, indicating with a nod of her tortoise head a beautiful creature festooned with silk scarves of a dozen different colors. "Woke up in a white slave brothel in Marrakech, ran for her life, has spent years wandering around trying to discover who she is." She laughed a low, warm laugh. "She found out here. The whole story's right there in that book."

Cort turned to her, firmly removing her withered claw from his arm.

"And you 'have it here for me,' don't you?"

"Yes; I have it here. In my fine stock."

"What *precisely* do you have that I want? Here. In your fine stock."

He didn't even need her to speak. He knew exactly what she would say. She would say, "Why, I have the answers you seek." And then he would saunter around the bookshop, feeling superior to these poor devils who had been standing here God only knew how long, and finally he'd turn to her and smile and say, "I don't even know the questions," and they would both smile at that one — he like an idiot because it was the most banal of clichés, she because she'd known he would say something dithering like that — and he would refrain from apologizing for the passing stupidity; and then he would ask her the question and she would point out a shelf and say, "The book you want is right there," and then she'd suggest he try pages such-and-such for exactly what he wanted to know: that which had driven him up the Coast.

And if, ten thousand years later, the karmic essence of all that's left of Sulayman the Magnificent, blessed be his name, Sulayman of the potent seal, Sultan and Master of all the jinn, of each and every class of *jinni*, *ghūl*, *ifrit*, *si'lā*, *div* and *iblis*; if that transubstantiated essence comes 'round again, like Halley's comet come 'round again; that transmogrified spirit circling back on its limitless hegira through crimson eternity . . . if it comes 'round again it would find him, Cort — Dr. Alexander Cort, D.D.S., a Dental Corporation — still standing here elbow-to-elbow with the other browsers. Coelacanths outlined in shale, mastodons flash-frozen in ice, wasps imbedded in amber. *Gnotobiosis*: forever.

"Why do I have the feeling all this isn't random?" Cort said to the old turtle woman. He began edging toward the door behind him. "Why do I have the feeling all this has been here waiting for me, just the way it was waiting for all the rest of these poor fucking losers? Why do I get the smell of rotting gardenias off you, old lady?" He was almost at the door.

She stood in a cleared space in the center of the bookshop, staring at him.

"You're no different, Dr. Cort. You need the answers, the same as the rest."

"Maybe a little love potion . . . a powerstone . . . immortality . . . all that good jive. I've seen places like this in television shows. But I don't bite, old lady. I have no need you can fill." And his hand was on the doorknob; and he was turning it; and he yanked; and the door opened to the ominous fog and the unending night and the waiting forest. And the old lady said, "Wouldn't you like to know when you'll have the best moment of your entire life?"

And he closed the door and stood with his back against it.

His smile was unhealthy. "Well, you got me," he whispered.

"When you'll be happiest," she said softly, barely moving her thin lips. "When you'll be strongest, most satisfied, at the peak of your form, most in control,

bravest, best-looking, most highly regarded by the rest of the world; your top moment, your biggest surge, your most golden achievement, that which forms the pattern for the rest of your life; the instant than which you will have no finer, if you live to be a thousand. Here in my fine stock I have a tome that will tell you the day, hour, minute, second of your noblest future. Just ask and it's yours. *I have it here for you.*"

And what does it cost me?"

She opened her wet mouth and smiled. Her wrinkled little hands fell open palms-up in the air before her. "Why, nothing," she said. "Like these others . . . you're just browsing, aren't you?" The limpet chill that ossified his spine told him there were worse things than deals with the devil. Just browsing, as an example.

"Well . . . ?" she asked, waiting.

He thought about it, wetting his lips — suddenly gone dry now that the decisive moment was at hand. "What if it comes only a few years from now? What if I've only got a little while to achieve whatever it was I always wanted to achieve? How do I live with the rest of my life after that, knowing I'll never be any better, any happier, any richer or more secure; knowing I'll never top what I did in that moment? What'll the rest of my life be worth?"

The tiny turtle woman shouldered aside two browsers—who moved sluggishly apart as if turning in their sleep—and drew a short, squat book from a shelf at her waist level. Cort blinked quickly. No, she hadn't *drawn* it out of the stacks. It had slid forward and *jumped* into her hand. It looked like an old Big Little Book.

She turned back and offered it to him. "Just browsing," she said, moistly.

He reached for it and stopped, curling his fingers back. She arched her finely-penciled eyebrows and gave him a bemused, quizzical look.

"You're awfully anxious to get me to read that book," he said.

"We are here to serve the public," she said, amiably.

"I have a question to ask you. No, two questions. There are two questions I want you to answer. Then I'll consider browsing through your fine stock."

"If I can't give you the answer — which is, after all, our business here — then I'm sure something in my fine stock has the proper response. But . . . take this book that you need, just hold it, and I'll answer your question. Questions. Two questions. Very important, I'm sure." She held out the squat little book. Cort looked at it. It was a Big Little Book, the kind he had had when he was a child; with pages of drawings alternating with pages of type, featuring comic strip heroes like Red Ryder or The Shadow or Skipppy. Within reach, the answer to the question everyone wanted to ask: what will be the best moment of my life?

He didn't touch it.

"I'll ask, you'll answer; *then* you got me . . . *then* I'll do some browsing."

She shrugged, as if to say, *as you choose*.

He thought: As you choose, so shall you reap.

He said: "What's the name of this bookshop?"

Her face twitched. Cort had the sudden rush of memory from childhood, when he'd first heard the story of Rumpelstiltskin. The turtle woman's face grew mean. "It doesn't have a name. It just is."

"How do we find you in the Yellow Pages?" Cort said, taunting her. It was obvious he was suddenly in a position of power. Even though he had no idea from

what source that power flowed.

"No name! No name at all! We don't need a name; we have a very select clientele! It's never had a name! We don't need any names!" Her voice, which had turtle smooth and soft and chocolate, had become rusted metal scraping rusted metal. No names, I don't got to tell you no names, I don't got to show you no stinkin' badges!

She paused to let the bile recede, and in the eye of the silence Cort asked his second question. "What's in this for you? Where's your fix? Where's the bottom-line profit on your p&l? What do you get out of this, frighty old lady?"

Her mouth went tight. Her blazing eyes seemed both ancient and silvery with youthful ferocity. "Clotho," she said. "Clotho: Rare Books."

He didn't recognize the name, but from the way she said it, he knew he had pried an important secret from her; had done it, apparently, because he was the first to have asked; had done it as *anyone* might have done it, had they thought of it. And having asked, and having been answered, he knew he was safe from her.

"So tell me, Miss Clotho, or Ms. Clotho, or Mrs., or whatever you happen to be: tell me . . . what do you get out of this? What coin of the realm do you get paid? You work this weird shop, you trap all these fools in here, and I'll bet when I walk out of here, poof! It all vanishes. Goes back to Never-Never Land. So what kind of a home life do you have? Do you eat three squares a day? Do you have to change your Tampax when you get your period? Do you even get the menses? Or has menopause already passed you by? Immortal, maybe? Tell me, weird old turtle lady, if you live forever do you get change of life? Do you still want to get laid? Did you ever get laid? How's your ka-ka, firm and hard? Do weirdy old fantastic ladies who vanish with their bookstore have to take a shit, c. maybe not, huh?"

She screamed at him. "You can't talk like that to me! Do you know who I am?"

He screamed right back at her. "Fuck no, I don't know who the hell you are, and what's more to the point, I don't give a righteous damn who you are!"

The zombie readers were now looking up. They seemed distressed. As if a long-held trance was being broken. They blinked furiously, moved aimlessly; they resembled . . . groundhogs coming out to check their shadows.

Clotho snarled at him, "Stop yelling! You're making my customers nervous!" "You mean I'm waking them up? C'mon, everybody, rise and shine! Swing on down! How ya fixed, destiny-wise?"

"Shut up!"

"Yeah? Maybe I will and maybe I won't, old turtle. Maybe you answer my question what you were doing waiting here for me specially, and maybe I let these goofballs go back to their browsing."

She leaned in as close as she could to him, without touching him, and she hissed like a snake. Then she said tightly, "You? What makes you think it was you we wait for? We wait for *everyone*. This was *your* turn. They *all* get a turn, you'll *all* get your turn in the browsing shop."

"What's this 'we' business? Are you feeling imperial?"

"We. My sisters and I."

"Oh, there's more than one of you, is there? A chain bookstore. Very cute. But then I suppose you have to have branches these days, what with the com-

petition from B. Dalton and Crown and Waldenbooks."

She clenched her teeth; and for the first time Cort could see that the old turtle actually *had* teeth inside those straight, thin lips. "*Take this book or get out of my shop,*" she said in a deadly whisper.

He took the Big Little Book from her quivering hands.

"I've never dealt with anyone as vile, as *rude*," she snarled.

"Customer is always right, sweetie," he said. And he opened the book to precisely the right page.

Where he read his finest moment. The knowledge that would make the remainder of his life an afterthought. An also-ran. Marking time. A steady ride on the downhill side.

When would it come? A year hence? Two years? Five, ten, twenty-five, fifty, or at the blessed final moment of life, having climbed, climbed, climbed all the way to the end? He read . . .

That his finest moment had come when he was ten years old. When, during a sandlot baseball game, a pick-up game in which you got to bat only if you put someone out, the best hitter in the neighborhood hit a shattering line drive to deepest center field where he was *always* forced to play, because he was no good at baseball, and he ran back and back and stuck up his bare hand and *miraculously*, as he, little Alex Cort, leaped as high as he could, *miraculously* the pain of the frazzled hardball as it hit his hand and stayed there was sweeter than anything he had ever felt before — or would feel again. The moment replayed in the words on the page of that terrible book. Slowly, slowly he sank to earth, his feet touching and his eyes going to his hand and there, in the red, anguished palm of his hand, without a trapper's mitt, he held the hardest, surest home run line drive ever hit by anyone. He was the killer, the master of the world, the tallest thing on the face of the earth, big and bold and golden, adept beyond any telling, miraculous; a miracle, a walking miracle. It was the best moment of his life.

At the age of ten.

Nothing else he would do in his life, nothing he had done between the age of ten and thirty-five as he read the Big Little Book, nothing he would do till he died at whatever number of years remained for him . . . nothing . . . nothing would match that moment.

He looked up slowly. He was having trouble seeing. He was crying. Clotho was smiling at him nastily. "You're lucky it wasn't one of my sisters. They react much worse to being screwed with."

She started to turn away from him. The sound of his slamming the Big Little Book closed onto the counter of the showcase stopped her. He turned without saying a word and started for the door. Behind him he heard her hurrying after him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Back to the real world." He had trouble speaking; the tears were making him sob and his words came raggedly.

"You've got to stay! *Everyone* stays."

"Not me, sweetie. The cheese stands alone."

"It's all futile. You'll never know grandeur again. It's all dross, waste, emptiness. There's nothing as good as you live to be a thousand."

He opened the door. The fog was out there. And the night. And the final

forest. He stopped and looked down at her. "Maybe if I'm lucky I won't live to be a thousand."

Then he stepped through the door of Clotho: Rare Books and closed it tightly behind him. She watched through the window as he began to walk off into the fog.

He stopped and leaned in to speak as close to the glass as he could. She strained her weird little turtle face forward and heard him say, "What's left may only be the tag-end of a shitty life . . . but it's *my* shitty life.

"And it's the only game in town, sweetie. The cheese stands alone."

Then he walked off into the fog, crying; but trying to whistle. ●

—Harlan Ellison

Harlan Ellison

As this issue goes to press, "The Cheese Stands Alone" is the latest work off the typewriter from one of today's most important creators of speculative fiction — a man who examines with piercing insight the blacker side of the human condition. Multi-award winner Ellison issues warnings that are uncomfortable for anyone wanting merely entertainment in his reading. Those who read for ideas will appreciate contemplating what this man has to

say. Ellison seems to offer a sort of dry run for dealing with potential realities of the frightening kind — but he never says that's the way it has to be. In fact, what comes through is that he hopes like hell things will turn out differently, better. Look for his most recent books — *Shatterday*, *All The Lies That Are My Life* and the forthcoming (or possibly out by now) *Blood's A Rover*, an episodic novel continuing the story of "A Boy and His Dog."—EM



Ernest Hogan

THE RAPE OF THINGS TO COME

G OOOOOOO, MYRON! GO, my man! You did it! You really did it!" It echoed through my ears, long after Jim, Joe and Rich (especially Rich — no, make that mostly Rich) were out of earshot. "You did it! You got your black ass the hell outta our shithole neighborhood with style, man, *real* style! You stan', man?" It was like Rich was in the seat next to me, giving the roar of the Boeing 909's airphibioid engines some heavy competition as they flung that big bird off the planet. "You landed yourself a job that every horny young man on Earth would kill to get! You're gonna be a spacie rapist, man! Getting paid for getting laid! And no sleaznoid can tell you 'No!' You really did it! So go flail the tail, pole the hole, and split the slit! *Really!*"

It went on and on, all through lift-off, coming on hot 'n heavy as the multiplying G-forces, just like Rich can do when he's feeling inspired, like he's got a 'lectronic loa in his head and it didn't let up until gravity began to fade-out altogether and Jim and Joe had probably dragged a ranting 'n raving Rich back to the Behemouth and were chugging back to Watts, where he probably wouldn't shut up until they'd poured enough beer down his gullet and he either passed out or threw up.

It was all too much. I was hanging on to the seat that was hugging me with seatbelts to keep me from floating around and bumping into the entertainment screens, heading for the Rockwell-MacDonaldland space colony to a new home, new job and a new world. How could it happen? Maybe I've got a 'lectronic loa in my head.

Illustrated by Dell Harris



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When the species started advertising for criminals, I was like everybody else; I agreed with Rich when he said, "Man, them species must have gotten their brains french-fried by cosmic rays or something! Talk about 'lectronic loas! The shrinks may call it a way to deal with anxieties caused by the overly secure environment of a space colony, but I call it an asteroid-sized load of bullshit! Could you imagine being too secure?"

Nope, I sure couldn't. Neither could anybody who ever hustled around an Earth city sweating 'n shivering, hoping he or she didn't get ripped off, ripped up or blown away by a friendly neighborhood streetsnake. Me and everyone I knew *and* most everyone I didn't know would roll over on the floor yukking it up when that blondie-blue-eyes, a real toothpaste lady with her goldy locks cut in a zero-G cut, came on the tube and cooed so you could feel her schooled-to-be-sexy voice tickle your erogenous zones, saying, "Life can get really *dull* sitting around in orbit with oodles of good-goody space cadets who couldn't hurt a fly — if we had flies — even if they tried. So, if you're an experienced criminal, why risk a possible jail sentence or even *death* by practicing your craft on the Mud-ball, when you can come up to a colony and be *appreciated*? We need a little excitement and danger up here! So, if you're a mugger, burglar, or rapist — sorry, but the law prohibits us from promoting murder — give your local Colony Agent a call. I'll *really* be looking forward to seeing you!" I'd just lock onto her tits (erect nipples!) 'n ass through her just-tight-enough spacie jumpsuit and guffaw.

It was the biggest joke around, but then I got in this, uh, *heavy* conversation with my lady, Vera:

"... but Myron," she said. "All my friends are getting married these days!"

"Yeah," I said, "and that proves that just about anything is possible. Did you check out the guys those bovines snagged? Not exactly your all-time winners!"

"Well, how would you feel if suddenly all your friends got married and you were the only one who was still single?"

"Lucky."

"You don't love me!"

"Sure I do, babe. It's just that, goddammit, I'm only twenty years old, I don't make enough money to pay rent and have a car without being part of a cruise crew, and I just don't want to settle down yet."

"Well! If that's the way you feel about it, I never want to see you again!" and she stomped back to the Orange Julius place where she worked.

Good riddance, I thought, the little heifer was getting a little too bovine for my tastes anyway. "Don't think I'm coming after you, Vera! There's a lot of 'zotics who'd love to have me for their man! Lots right here in this mall!"

Unfortunately, a quick survey of the girls in the mall and the surrounding area proved that they weren't exactly all lined up to get into my pants. It was Sleazoid City.

Then, if that wasn't enough for me to worry about, one morning when I was freshly shaved 'n showered, neatly dressed with a tie wrapped around my neck like a cuddly rattlesnake ready to hoof my dangerous way from the apartment to the mall for another dreary day of selling shoes, the phone rattled.

"Hey, Myron," it was one of the jerks from work. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"You don't have to come to work today."

"Great!"

"Or ever."

"Say what?"

"You know our brilliant manager?"

"What's Captain Dumbshit done this time?"

"He's in jail down in T.J., you know, things don't always go better with coke!"

"It figures, but what does that have to do with not ever going back to work?"

"Well, the main office is really destabilized over this. They've decided to fire everybody, close the store down for a while and start it over with a clean slate to keep things sleek image-wise."

"Shee-it!"

Next Saturday night I was subbed-out. No money, no woman, and Rich, Jim and Joe were getting ready for a cruise, without me. Rich's mouth was going. So was Jim's soon-to-be-plugged-into-the-Behemoth stereo, blurting out mojo moozik, Nuke Damballah's "Slitha Thru Da City" off his *'Lectronic Loas* album.

"Come on," said Rich. "Get boosted Myron my man! A Saturday night at home never killed anybody."

"GONNA SLITHA THRU DA CITY!" sang Nuke in that synthetic Futuro-Africoid accent that, if you fall for the B.S./P.R., came to that Detroit boy when the 'lectric loas first got into his head, told him to quit his job as a computer programmer and create mojo moozik, the sound of the Twenty-First Century.

"We all agreed to the no-gas-money/stay-home rule when we formed this cruise crew. Don't worry. You'll find work soon."

"SSSSLITHA THRU DA CITY!"

"Just look at this situation as a chance to break out of your usual routine and get into something new." Then he turned to Joe. "And you, boost-up too. You gotta job and gas money."

"SSSSLITHA THRU DA CITY!"

"And maybe she ain't pregnant! Besides that BXZ stuff in the water that's been causing all those spontaneous abortions may solve your problem if she is!"

"AAAAW NITE LONG!"

"Yup, it's a weird world we live in. Well, what should it be tonight, Whittier or Van Nuys?"

"Van Nuys," said Jim. "White meat."

"Yeah," said Joe. "We ain't been in no race riot in a long time."

When the door closed, I wondered if they'd already started looking for somebody to take my place in the crew. Then I went to raid the stash (not the quasi-legal domestic, but the Mutant Mex, from those odd plants created by that unsuccessful low-radiation defoliant that either gives a higher high or makes you a bullet-proof, brain-rotted super-criminal depending on if you're talking to a smoker or the police). I rolled me about three joints, sat in front of the TV that I paid for, thought about selling it, then turned to the last resort of weekend night life, the Saturday night horror movies. One from Sweden about incestuous werewolves.

Soon I was feeling good, even though I hadn't any idea of what was going on in the movie. I had smoked all three joints, and was thinking about rolling another when that spacie blondie-blue-eyes appeared on the screen shaking her stuff

and purring her invitation and I don't know if it was my subbed-out situation, the Mutant Mex or a 'lectronic loa slithering into my head or all three, but I didn't laugh. That toothpaste lady didn't seem at all silly; she was really 'zotic, and what she had to say made sense. I wanted to reach right into the TV and then *sque-e-eze* her out of that jumpsuit, then smear her all over my body.

The next morning I woke up to the sound of mojo moozik, the smell of stale beer, old dope smoke, vomit and the sight of Rich, Jim and Joe strewn all over the apartment in varying states of unconsciousness. It was another no-score night.

Stepping over the bodies, I turned off Jim's stereo, got myself all cleaned 'n prettied up, then zipped over to my friendly neighborhood — opened seven days a week for the good of the economy — Colony Agent to look into the possibilities of becoming a professional rapist.

"Have you had any experience in rape?" asked the white liberal lady who was feeling so guilty about being scared of being in this neighborhood that she seemed to glow as she punched my application into the computer.

I slid my leg under the desk in between hers and began to rub. She pulled away so fast that she nearly fell out of her chair. I leaned over to grab her hand and give some heavy, lecherous eye-contact and said, "What do you think, baby?"

On EXPERIENCED? she punched YES.

It was a lie, though. I'd never raped anybody. I'm the type of guy who avoided violence at all costs, but would never admit it to any of my friends (especially Joe), even when blitzed out of my mind.

AS THE BOING 909 approached the Colony, I began to worry. Not that anybody would find out, but, well, was I *really* qualified for the job? I'd spent most of my time since applying bragging to my crew, listening to Rich's ranting about it, and hanging out at shopping malls checking out 'zotics of all races, creeds, colors, shapes 'n sizes, wishing I was on Rockwell-MacDonaldland ready to go to work so hard that once I nearly tore open my pants and had to rush to a restroom where this tacky gay in a see-thru suit asked if he could slob my nob. I told him no, but he could go eat shit, zipped into the first available stall, slammed the door then locked her up good. How would it be when I had to take a woman against her will and she wasn't drunk or stoned? All species couldn't be going along with this crazy plan! And what if she knew kung fu or something?

To relax, I switched on the TV and got that TV public service spot where a lady shows how an attacker can be discouraged by using a simple martial arts move that pops his eyeball out of the socket — it really gets to me even though it's just a robot getting the Popeye Treatment — when I looked up to the entertainment screen and saw Nuke Damballah, fully holographified, staring down with wide mojo eyes. It was one of those 3D productions that rich people collect and folks like me had to watch in 2D on TV at home and in public showings. His medusoid braids had bones and electronic parts in them, he wore only cloned-leopardskin loincloth, python-skin A 'n B kicking boots, wrist-rattles and a multi-color clay that flaked 'n cracked leaving a technicolor fallout as his fingers rained over his synth and his wrist-rattles added spice to "Slitha Thru Da City." And everybody on the 909 (that I could see) was really enjoying it, even the old

folks — even the old *white* folks. Like they all stan'. Like they got 'lectronic loas in their heads.

What the air-conditioned hell was I getting into? I brimmed-over with worry and culture shock throughout the trip.

I FRETTE^d about my check-in, and after we arrived and I was being fitted with a uniform of black sneakers, black jeans and a red T-shirt emblazoned with "RAPIST" in big, black letters on the front and back, the hyena-faced bozo dispensing the uniform leered and hummed along with more funny muzak.

"Isn't there any kind of orientation?" I asked.

"Naw," said Hyena Face. "Just go out and have yourself lots of fun!"

I found my steps kept getting in time with that weird muzak as I wandered through the colony, which was like being in a gigantic shopping mall, only it went on forever and there were no exits. Work areas, residential areas, and especially the shopping areas were all the same. Clean, expensive, impressive. It was one helluva lot better than the smog-eaten near-ruins that I've spent most of my life in. Class. Real class.

Then I figured out what was so strange about the muzak. The tune was familiar. Real familiar. It was "Slitha Thru Da City!" Did Nuke Damballas puke on his synth, or laugh all the way to the bank, or both?

As for the women, well, they weren't all perfect, cream-of-the-crop 'zotics, cloned from movie stars, Miss Americas, wet dreams, centerfolds and sex symbols that jiggle across screens big and small until they get you so worked up that you go out and pick up on the first thing you run into that looks remotely like a female and you pray isn't a transvestite. They were more like ordinary, everyday types in on-duty uniforms and off-duty casuals, not exactly what I was hoping for, but the fact that they were *all* available made them look good. They were also checking *me* out, smiling at me, giving yearning looks that would turn to masks of disappointment as I passed them by.

And I *was* passing them by. I just wasn't sure of myself. This place was so clean and so well lit. That and the mojo muzak made it hard to get into that mean, streetsnake state of mind in which you think the unthinkable and often end up *doing* it. I'd expected to be grabbing them and doing it in dark, secluded places like parking structures, but there were no cars here. So there were no places to park them. They didn't expect me to do out in the open with all kinds of people watching, did they?

I was about to stop for a Big Mac when someone said, "Hey, Mr. Rapist!"

It was a middle-aged white man with his arm around a woman who wasn't much younger. They were wearing matching T-shirts 'n shorts of tasteless computer-generated prints in more colors than you would want on bloated bodies that were like double-bovine slopping over into hyper-porcine. She wasn't wearing a bra. They probably moved up to get weightless from time to time and get a relief from carrying around all that flab.

"You new at the job or something?" the man said.

"Uh, yeah," I said.

"It figures, the way you're wandering around letting the good ones get away. Don't be afraid to take some initiative! The women here, even my wife," she giggled and winked, "would be delighted to have you pick them."

"Yeah, I know."

"You don't know the half of it. Up here we do our jobs, and when we go off-duty we get tired of playing and going to entertainments and taking colony-approved drugs. Life is just too easy here and most of us grew up used to being threatened. We need people like you to help us cope with this peaceful but boring environment."

"Yes, but it's all so weird."

"It may seem that way on the Mudball, but up here things are different. We're building a better world, with values of its own. Sure, it'll take a while to get used to it, but in a few months you'll be like the rest of us, doing your job and eagerly waiting to go off-duty, and feel the thrill of danger as you walk the halls."

"I guess so."

"Hey, Edna," he said to his wife. "How long has it been since you've been raped?"

"Oh, it must have been weeks! Remember, it was that Puerto Rican boy. He was beautiful, such an animal!"

"Why don't you let this boy take you on so he can get the hang of it?"

I reluctantly reached over and grabbed a large, flabby arm, wondering just who was getting raped by whom here.

"No," she said. "Over here. Under the cameras. I think we'll get a copy of the tape to send to our kids on the Mudball. They'll get a kick out of it. Would you believe that I've never been raped by a black before?"

I hadn't noticed the cameras before. They were everywhere. I couldn't believe it. A crowd was gathering to watch.

As I tried to push the old bovine down she hit me on the cheek and said, "You filthy beast! Leave me alone!"

"Don't just stand there you idiot!" an onlooker said. "Get in there and rape!"

Edna was saying the same thing with her face. I tackled her. She hit me on the arm and kicked my shin. She was concentrating on non-vital areas, so she'd bruise me up, but not put me out of commission.

"That your wife getting raped?" someone asked her husband.

"Yes."

"Wanna bet he doesn't follow through?"

"You crazy? That's a healthy young black man! Of course, he'll make it!"

"Don't be too sure. I've been watching him. He's too hesitant."

"He's new at the job."

"Oh."

I really tried, but I just couldn't do it. Soon the crowd left in disgust. The cameras turned away.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I just . . ."

"It's okay," Edna said, looking disappointed. "Maybe we'll try again when you're used to it."

"Sure," her husband said. "I know a rapist when I see one and you've got the markings of a great one. You just need a little practice. Here, I'm giving you a tip anyway."

"Thanks," I said, feeling like a whore as I picked up the five-buck coin.

As they walked away they said:

"He'll never make it."

"I don't see why they don't screen them more carefully."

LATER, WHILE Hyena Face was spraying Hurtaway on my bumps 'n bruises, I said, "Maybe I'm just not cut out for this business."

Hyena Face laughed his bizarre hyenaoid laugh and said, "Just stick with it a while, kid. Give her a chance."

"But I feel so used."

"That's better than feeling useless."

After a Beefy McDinner, I bought a pack of Smokey McHighs and headed for my cubicle for a shower, smoke 'n sleep. After lighting a McHigh (there's something *unnatural* about marijuana in neat little factory-rolled cigarettes), I flicked on the TV, caught the all-crime news channel. They were talking about me.

"... though it may have been a case of first-day jitters, Myron Jones gave what has to be the poorest performance given by any rapist on this colony in a long, long time."

I changed it to a propaganda show about how space travel is bringing about a New Golden Age and kept on smoking.

Soon the vidiphone rang. I never had a vidiphone before. When I answered it, Rich, Jim and Joe appeared, jammed into one of the vidiphone booths at the mall back home.

"Hello, you lucky bastard!" said Rich.

"Hell, crew," I said. "How is it you can afford a long-distance vidiphone call?"

"Oh," said Joe. "We managed to scrounge up enough coins."

"Yeah," said Jim.

"Well, tell us man," said Rich. "How was it? Did you get to rape on your first day?"

"Well," I said, "Sort of, I mean, yeah." I just couldn't tell *them* the truth.

They gave a harmonic whoop of ecstasy.

"How was she, man?" "A real 'zotic?" "No bovine, eh?"

"She was real ultra-'zotic," I found myself lying. "Like the toothpaste lady in the commercial, only with a lot more where it counts. And you know what? She loved it!"

They went wild, and believed every word.

"Y'know what, man?" said Rich. "You're a hero. A real hero! You proved that a poor boy from Watts *can* go out and grab himself a hunk of the good life! Do you know what that *means*? You're gonna be a legend around here!"

Rich was really into it again; I even began to *feel* like a hero. And in a way I was, to them, back on the Mudball. People need dreams — they need to be assured that somewhere it is possible to have something better than what they're stuck with.

I turned off the TV and turned on the radio, and kept on smoking. "Slitha Thru Da City" came on, the real thing by Nuke Damballah. I could feel a 'lectronic loa worm its way into my head.

Things are different out in space. Life still drives you crazy, but in new ways. The 'lectronic loas are younger, stranger, with a new kind of voltaic voodoo that makes you do things that would be impossible on the Mudball. They made me want to be the greatest goddam rapist these species ever saw.

THE NEXT DAY I went after this cute little blonde, the kind I had always lusted after, but never had the nerve to reach out and grab. I wrenched her away

from her boyfriend, who watched in awe as I threw her down and jumped on her. He led the crowd in urging me on. She spat in my face with love.

"You were great," he said. "You should rape my sister sometime."

The rape got great reviews. "Myron Jones is ready now, so watch out, women!" one critic said. I got a cheap tape of it and sent it to the guys. They loved it.

I'm now a solid, spacie streetsnake stirring up excitement wherever I go, but still, every once in a while, I get this nagging feeling that I'm just some kind of newfangled whore. It bothers me a while, then I get a little high, listen to the rhythms of the colony, let a 'lectronic loa into my head, laugh like ol' Hyena Face and slither over to a nice, juicy victim. ●

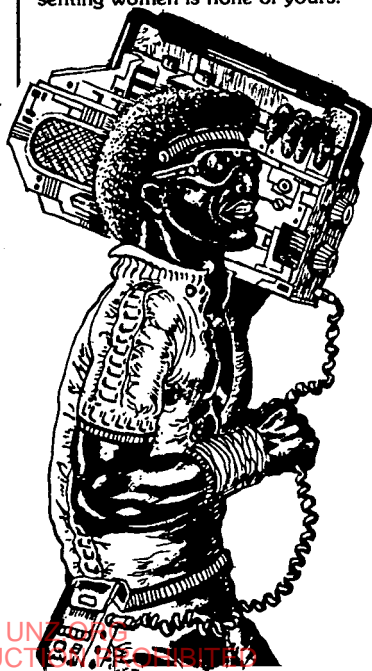
Ernest Hogan

Part of the reason why a lot of what I do (off paper as well as on) turns out science fiction is because it's so easy for me to identify with aliens and mutants. I'm racially ambiguous. Being a Chicano with Black Irish genes, I'm more Mutant Mex than Futuro-Africoid, and look like that brown, mongrelized Third World/United Nations nightmare that ruins the sleep of so many Klansmen. Strangers are always walking up to me and asking, "What are you?" as in "Are you one of US, or (yeech!) THEM?" I've been called "nigger" more times than most non-Africans have.

This all leaves me with no culture that I can really call my own, so I have no choice but to tear bits and pieces of my environment (Southern California, a large-scale, drive-thru collage) and reassemble them

into my own culture. Some of these pieces are science fiction (real sf as well as cheap sci-fi), surrealism (I was a teenaged dadaist), comics (both over and underground), Warner and Fleischer Brothers cartoons, American music (ragtime, blues, rock, Big Band, even New Wave), all kinds of freako movies, Henry Miller, Jerry Cornelius, Hunter S. Thompson, assorted warmed-over psychedelia, shopping malls, amusement parks and much, much more!

It all makes me a full-time thoughtcriminal, merrily mindfucking the masses for a more absurdly delightful future. Culture shock is my business. What I do to consenting women is none of yours.



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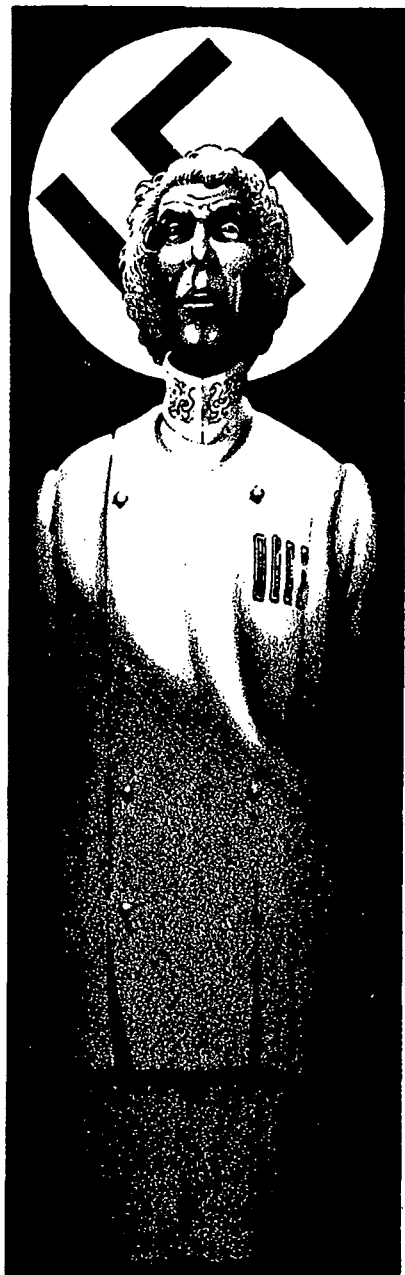
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MOON OF ICE

Brad Linaweaver

Entries from the diary of Dr. Joseph Goebbels, New Berlin, April, 1965.

TODAY I attended the state funeral for Adolf Hitler. They asked me to give the eulogy. It wouldn't have been so bothersome except that Himmler pulled himself out of his thankful retirement to advise me on all the things I mustn't say. The old fool still believes that we are laying the foundation for a religion. Acquainted as he is with my natural skepticism, he never ceases to worry that I will say something in public not meant for the consumption of the masses. It is a pointless worry on his part; not even early senility should enable him to forget that I am the propaganda expert. Still, I do not question his insistence that he is in rapport with what the masses feel most deeply. I leave such matters to one who is uniquely quali-

Illustrated by Stephen Fabian 42

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fied for the task.

I suppose that I was the last member of the entourage to see Hitler alive. Speer had just left, openly anxious to get back to his work with the von Braun team. In his declining years he has taken to involving himself full time with the space program. This question of whether the Americans or we will reach the moon first seems to me a negligible concern. I am convinced by our military experts that the space program that really matters is in terms of orbiting platforms for the purpose of global intimidation. Such a measure seems entirely justified if we are to give the Fuehrer his thousand year Reich (or something even close).

The Fuehrer and I talked of Himmler's plans to make him an SS saint. "How many centuries will it be," he asked in a surprisingly firm voice, "before they forget I was a man of flesh and blood?"

"Can an Aryan be any other?" I responded drily, and he smiled as he is wont to do at my more jestful moments.

"The spirit of Aryanism is another matter," he said. "The same as destiny or any other workable myth."

"Himmler would ritualize these myths into a new reality," I pointed out.

"Of course," agreed Hitler. "That has always been *his* purpose. You and I are realists. We make use of what is available." He reflected for a moment and then continued: "The war was a cultural one. If you ask the man in the street what I really stood for, he would not come near the truth. Nor should he!"

I smiled. I'm sure he took that as a sign of assent. This duality of Hitler's, with its concern for exact hierarchies to replace the old social order — and what is true for the Volk is not always what is true for us — seemed to me just another workable myth, often contrary to our stated purposes. I would never admit that to him. In his own way, Hitler was quite the bone-headed philosopher.

"*Mein Fuhrer*," I began, entirely a formality in such a situation but I could tell that he was pleased I had used the address, "the Americans love to make fun of your most famous statement about the Reich that will last one thousand years, as

though what we have accomplished now is an immutable status quo."

He laughed. "I love those Americans. I really do. They believe their own democratic propaganda . . . so obviously what we tell our people must be what we believe! American credulity is downright refreshing at times, especially after dealing with Russians."

On the subject of Russians Hitler and I did not always agree, so there was no point in continuing that line of dialogue at this late date. Before he died, I desperately wished to ask him some questions that had been haunting me. I could see that his condition was deteriorating. This would be my last opportunity.

I tried to prepare him for controversial questions the way a nanny would lay the groundwork to quiz a child. I should have known better. He did not let me finish my diplomatic opening comments. "Joseph, you and I were brothers in Munich. I am on my deathbed. Surely you can't be hesitant to ask me anything. Speak, man. I would talk in my remaining hours."

I asked if he had believed his last speech of encouragement in those final days of the war when it had seemed certain that we would be annihilated. Despite his words of stern optimism there was quite literally no way of his knowing that our scientists had just solved the heavy water problem (communications had been severely curtailed) when he made the speech. This meant we had developed the atom bomb first. I still viewed that period as miraculous. We had just enough V-2 rockets to launch the atom bomb attack against the oncoming Allied forces in 1945. Radiation deaths had mounted on our side as well as with the enemy. It stopped the invasion. A remaining V-2 had delivered the A Bomb on London to fulfill a political prophecy of Hitler's.

"Of course not," he answered. "I had gotten to the point where I said we would recover at the last second with a secret weapon of invincible might as nothing more than pure rhetoric. I had lost hope long ago. The timing on that last speech could not have been better. Fate was on our side."

I remembered his exaltation at the films of nuclear destruction, shown on the same

projector that had first enabled him to see von Braun's rockets. At each report of radiation dangers, he had the more feverishly buried himself in that bunker, despite the assurances of every expert that Berlin was safe from the fallout. Never in my life have I known a man more concerned for his health, more worried about the least bit of a sore throat after a grueling harangue of a speech. And the absurd lengths he went to for his diet, limited even by vegetarian standards. Yet his precautions had brought him to this date, to see himself master of all Europe. Who is to say?

He propped himself up slightly in bed, a gleam of joy in his eyes. He looked like a little boy again. "I'll tell you something about my thousand years. Himmler invests it with the mysticism you'd expect. Ever notice how Jews, Muslims, Christians, and our very own pagans have a predilection for millenia? The number works a magic spell on them."

"Pundits in America observe that also. They say the number is merely good psychology, and point to the longevity of the ancient empires of China, Rome and Egypt for similar numerical records. They say that Germany will never hold out that long."

"It won't," said Hitler, matter-of-fact.

"What do you mean?" I asked, suddenly not sure of the direction in which he was moving. I suspected it had something to do with the cultural theories, but of his grandest dreams for the future Hitler had always been reticent . . . even with me.

"It will take at least that long," he said, "for the New Culture to take root on earth. For the New Europe to be what I have foreseen."

"If von Braun has his way, we'll be long gone from earth by then! At least he seems to plan passages for many Germans on his spaceships."

"Germans!" spat out Hitler. "What care I for Germans or von Braun's space armada? Let the technical side of Europe spread out its power in any direction it chooses. Speer will be *their* god. He is the best of that collection. But let the other side determine the values, man. The values, the spiritual essence. Let them move through the galaxy for all I care, so

long as they look homeward to me for the guiding cultural principles. And Europe will be the eternal monument to that vision. I speak of a Reich lasting a thousand years? It will take that long to finish the job, to build something that will then last for the rest of eternity."

The old fire was returning. His voice was its old, strong hypnotic self. His body quivered with the glory of his personal vision, externalized for the whole of mankind to touch, to worship . . . or to fear. I bowed my head in the presence of the greatest man in history.

He fell back for a minute, exhausted, lost in the phantasms behind his occluded eyes. Looking at the weary remains of this once human dynamo, I was sympathetic, almost sentimental. I said: "Remember when we first met through our anti-Semitic activities? It was an immediate bond between us."

He chuckled. "Oh, for the early days of the party again. At the beginning you thought me too bourgeois."

He was dying in front of me, but his mind was as alert as ever. "Few people understand why we singled out the Jew, even with all the Nazi literature available," I continued.

He took a deep breath. "I was going to turn all of Europe into a canvas on which I'd paint the future of humanity. The Jew would have been my severest and most obstinate critic." The Fuehrer always had a gift for the apt metaphor. "Your propaganda helped keep the populace inflamed. That anger was only fuel for the task at hand."

We had discussed on previous occasions the fundamental nature of the Judeao-Christian ethic, and how the Christian was a spiritual Semite (as any Pope would observe). The Jew had made an easy scapegoat. There was such a fine old tradition behind it. But once the Jew was for all practical purposes eliminated from Europe, there remained the vast mass of Christians, many Germans among them also. Hitler had promised strong measures in confidential statements to high officials of the SS. Martin Bormann had been the most ardent advocate of the *Kirchenkampf*, the campaign against the

churches. In the ensuing years of peace and the nuclear stalemate with the United States, little had come of it. I brought up the subject again.

"It will take generations," he answered. "The Jew is only the first step. And please remember that Christianity will by no means be the last obstacle, either. Our ultimate enemy is an idea dominant in the United States in theory, if not in practice. Their love of the individual is more dangerous to us than even mystical egalitarianism. In the end the decadent idea of complete freedom will be more difficult to handle than all the religions and other imperial governments put together." He lapsed back into silence, but only for a moment. "We are the last bastion of true Western Civilization. America is always a few steps from anarchy. They would sacrifice the state to the individual! But Soviet Communism — despite an ideology — was little better. Its state was all muscles and no brain. It forbade them to get the optimum use out of their best people. Ah, only in the German Empire, and especially here in New Berlin, do we see the ideal at work. The state uses most individuals as the sheep they were meant to be. More important is that the superior individual is allowed to use the state."

"Like most of the *Gauleiters*?" I asked, again in a Puckish mood.

He laughed in a loud and healthy voice. "Good God," he said. "Nothing's perfect . . . except the SS, of course."

I did not have the heart to tell him that I thought he had been proved soundly mistaken on one of his predictions for the United States. With the nuclear stalemate and the end of the war — America having dropped its atomic bombs on Japan and riveting the world's attention in the same fashion as we — the isolationist forces in that country had had a resurgence. In a few years they had moved the country back to the foreign policy it held before the Spanish American War. Hitler had predicted grim consequences for that country's economy. The reverse unoblingly came true.

The latest reports I had seen demonstrated that the American Republic was thriving, even as our economy was badly

suffering from the numerous entanglements that go hand-in-gauntlet with an imperial foreign policy. We had quite simply over-extended ourselves. New Berlin, after all, was modeled on the old Rome . . . and like the Roman Empire, we were having trouble financing the operation and keeping the population sufficiently amused.

I'm as dedicated a National Socialist as ever, but I must admit that America does not have our problems. What it has is a lot of goods, a willingness to do business in gold (our stockpile of which increased markedly after the war) and paper guarantees that we would not interfere in their hemisphere. We keep our part of the bargain fairly well: All adults understand that Latin America is fair game.

There is, of course, no censorship for the upper strata of Nazi Germany. The friends and families of high Reich officialdom can openly read or see anything they want. I still have trouble with this modification in our policy. At least I keep cherished memories of 1933 when I personally gave the order to burn the books at the Franz Joseph Platz outside Berlin University. I have never enjoyed myself more than in the period when I perfected an acid rhetoric as editor of *Der Angriff*, which more often than not inspired the destruction of writings inimical to our point of view. Those days seem far away now.

Hitler would not have minded a hearty exchange on the subject of censorship. He likes any topic that relates at some point to the arts. He would have certainly preferred such a discussion to arguing about capitalist policy in America. I didn't pursue either. I am satisfied to leave to these diary pages my conclusion that running an empire is a lot more expensive than having a fat republic, sitting back, and collecting profits. England used to understand that. If they hadn't forgotten, we probably wouldn't be where we are today.

Ironically for someone reputed to be a political and military genius, Hitler has spent the entirety of his retirement (he holds his title for life) ignoring both subjects and concentrating on his cultural theories. He became a correspondent with the woman who chairs the anthropology

department of New Berlin University (no hearth and home for her) and behaved almost as though he were jealous of her job. Lucky for her that he didn't stage a putsch. Besides, she was a fully accredited Nazi.

I think that Eva took the whole thing quite well.

As I stood in Hitler's sick room, watching the man to whom I had devoted my life waning before me, I felt an odd ambivalence. On one hand, I was sorry to see him go. On the other hand, I felt a kind of — I'm not sure how to put it — relief. It was as though when he died, I would at last begin my true retirement. The other years of supposed resignation from public life did not count. Truly, Adolf Hitler had been at the very center of my life.

I wish that he had not made his parting comment to me. "*Herr Dr. Goebbels*," he said, and the returned formality made me uncharacteristically click my heels and adopt a military posture, "I want to remind you of one thing. Goering before he died told me that in his opinion our greatest achievement — among many — was the brilliant secrecy with which we surrounded the extermination programs. Despite the passage of time, I believe this secret should be preserved. In fact, there may come a day when no official in the German government knows of it. Only the hierarchy of the SS will preserve the knowledge in their initiatory rites."

"Allied propaganda continues to speak of it, *mein Fuhrer*. Various Jewish organizations in America and elsewhere continue to mourn the lost millions every year."

"Propaganda is one thing. Proof is another. You know this as well as anyone. I'd like to hear you agree that the program should remain a secret."

I was taken aback that he would even have to ask. "Without question, I agree!" I remembered how we had exploited in our propaganda the Russian massacre of the Poles at Katyn. The evidence was solid . . . and there is such a thing as world opinion. I could see his point. At this late date there was little advantage in admitting to our genocide policy for the Jews. The world situation had changed since the war.

Nevertheless his request seemed peculiar and unnecessary. In the light of later events I cannot help but wonder whether or not Hitler really was psychic. Could he have known of the personal disaster that would soon engulf members of my family?

THE CONVERSATION kept running through my mind on the way to the funeral. As we traveled under Speer's Arch of Triumph, I marveled for — I suppose — the hundredth time at his architectural genius. Germany would be paying for this city for the next fifty years, but it was worth it. Besides, we had to do something with all that Russian gold! What is gold, in the end, but a downpayment on the future, be it the greatest city in the world or buying products from America?

The procession moved at a snail's pace, and considering the distance we had to cover I felt it might be the middle of the night by the time we made it to the Great Hall. The day lasted long enough, as it turned out.

The streets were thronged with sobbing people, Hitler's beloved Volk. The swastika flew from every window; I thought to conceive a poetic image to describe the thousands of fluttering black shapes, but when all I could think of was a myriad of spiders, I gave up. Leave poetry to those more qualified, I reminded myself.

Finally we were moving down the great avenue between Goering's Palace and the Soldier's Hall. The endless vertical lines of these towering structures always remind me of Speer's ice cathedral lighting effects at Nuremberg. Nothing he has done in concrete has ever matched what he did with pure light!

God, what a lot of white marble! The glare hurts my eyes sometimes. When I think of how we denuded Italy of its marble to accomplish all this, I recognize the Duce's one invaluable contribution to the German Reich.

Everywhere you turn in New Berlin there are statues of heroes and horses; horses and heroes. And flags, flags, flags. Sometimes I become just a little bored with our glorious Third Reich. Perhaps success must lead to excess. But it keeps beer and cheese on the table, as my wife, Magda,

would say. I am an author of it. I helped to build this gigantic edifice with my ideas as surely as the workmen did with the sweat of their brows and the stone from the quarries. And Hitler, dear, sweet Hitler — he ate up little inferior countries and spat out the mortar of this metropolis. Never has a man been more the father of a city.

The automobiles had to drive slowly to keep pace with the horses in the lead, pulling the funeral caisson of the Fuehrer. I was thankful when we reached our destination.

It took a while to seat the officialdom. As I was in the lead group, and seated first, I had to wait interminably while everyone else ponderously filled in. The hall holds thousands upon thousands. Speer saw to that. I had to sit still and watch what seemed like the whole German nation enter and take seats.

Many spoke ahead of me. After all, when I was finished with the official eulogy, there would be nothing left but to take him down and pop him in the vault. When Norway's grand old man, Quisling, rose to say a few words, I was delighted that he only took a minute. Really amazing. He praised Hitler as the destroyer of the Versailles penalties, and that was pretty much it.

The only moment of interest came when a representative of the sovereign nation of Burgundy stood in full SS regalia. A hush fell over the audience. Most Germans have never felt overly secure at the thought of Burgundy, a nation given exclusively to the SS... and outside the jurisdiction of German Law. It was one of the wartime promises Hitler made that he kept to the letter. The country was carved out of France (which I'm sure never noticed — all they ever cared about was Paris, anyway).

The SS man spoke of blood and iron. He reminded us that the war had not ended all that long ago, although many Germans would like to forget that and merely wallow in the proceeds of the adventure. This feudal lord was also the only speaker at the funeral to raise the old spectre of the International Zionist Conspiracy, which I thought was a justifiable piece of nostalgia, considering the moment. As he droned on in a somewhat monotonous voice, I

thought about Hitler's comment regarding the secret death camps. Of course, there are still Jews in the world, and Jewish organizations in America worth reckoning with, and a group trying to re-establish Israel — so far unsuccessfully — and understandably no group of people would more like to see us destroyed. What I think is important to remember is that the Jew is hardly the only enemy of the Nazi.

By the time he was finished, the crowd was seething in that old, pleasing, violent way... and I notice that many of them restrained themselves with good Prussian discipline from cheering and applauding the speaker (which would not be entirely proper at a funeral). If they had broken protocol, however, I would have gladly joined in!

It seemed that an eternity had passed by the time I stood at the microphone to make my oration. I was surrounded by television cameras. How things have changed since the relatively simple days of radio. I'm sure that many of my ardent supporters were disappointed that I did not give them a more rousing speech. I was the greatest orator of them all, even better than Hitler (if I may say so). My radio speeches are universally acclaimed as having been the instrumental factor in upholding German morale. I was more than just the Minister of Propaganda — I was the soul of National Socialism.

Toward the end of the war, I made the greatest speech of my career, and this in the face of total disaster. I had no more believed at the time that we could win than Hitler had when he made his final boast about a mysterious secret weapon still later in the darkest of dark hours. My friends were astonished that after my emotional speech, I could sit back and dispassionately evaluate the effect I had had upon my listeners. Such is the nature of a good propagandist.

Alas for the nostalgia buffs, there was no fire or fury in my words that day. I was economical of phrase. I listed his most noteworthy achievements; I made an objective statement about his sure and certain place in history; I told the mourners that they were privileged to have lived in the time of this man. You know, that sort of thing.

I finished on a quiet note. I said: "This man was a symbol. He was an inspiration. He took up a sword against the enemies of a noble idea that had almost vanished. He fought small and mean notions of man's destiny. Adolf Hitler restored the beliefs of our strong ancestors. Adolf Hitler restored the sanctity of our" — and I used the loaded term — "race." (I could feel the stirring in the crowd. It works every time.) "Adolf Hitler is gone. But what he accomplished will never die . . . if" — I gave them my best stare — "you work to make sure that his world is your world."

I was finished. The last echoes of my voice died to be replaced by the strains of *Die Walkure* from the Berlin Philharmonic.

On the way to the vault, I found myself thinking about numerous things, none of them having to do directly with Hitler. I thought of Speer and the space program; I philosophized that Jewry is an *idea*; I revelled in what we had done to London, and how England would never be the same; I briefly ran an inventory of my mistress, my children, my wife; I wondered what it would be like to live in America, with a color television and bomb shelter in every home.

The coffin was deposited in the vault, behind a bullet-proof sheet of glass. His waxen-skinned image would remain there indefinitely, preserved for the future. I went home, then blissfully to bed and sleep.

October, 1965

Last night I dreamed that I was eighteen years old again. I remembered a Jewish teacher I had at the time, a pleasant and competent fellow. What I remember best about him was his sardonic sense of humor.

Funny how after all this time I still think about Jews. I have written that they were the inventor of the lie. I used that device to powerful effect in my propaganda (Hitler claimed to have made this historical "discovery.")

My so-called retirement keeps me busier than ever. The number of books on which I'm currently engaged is monumen-

tal. I shudder to think of all the unfinished works I shall leave behind at my death. The publisher called the other day to tell me that the Goebbels war memoirs are going into their ninth printing. That is certainly gratifying. They sell quite well all over the world.

My daughter Hilda, besides being a competent chemist, is serious about becoming a writer as well, and if her letters are any sign, I have no doubt but that she will succeed on her own merits. Alas, her political views become more dangerous all the time, and I fear she would be in grave trouble by now were it not for her prominent name. The German Freedom League, of which she is a conspicuous member, is composed of sons and daughters of approved families and so enjoys its immunity from prosecution. At least they are not rabble rousers (not that I would mind if they had the proper Nazi ideas). They are purely intellectual critics and as such are accommodated.

It was not too many years after our victory before the charter was passed allowing for freedom of thought for the elite of our citizenry. I laugh to think how I initially opposed the move, and remember all too well Hitler's surprising indifference to the measure. After the war he was a tired man, willing to leave administration to party functionaries, and the extension of ideology to the SS in Burgundy. He became frankly indolent in his new life style.

Anyway, it doesn't matter now. "Freedom of thought" for the properly indoctrinated Aryan appears harmless enough. So long as he benefits from the privilege of real personal power at a fairly early age, the zealous desire for reform is usually quickly sublimated into the necessities of intelligent and disciplined management.

Friday's *New Berlin Post* arrived with my letter in answer to a question frequently raised by the new crop of young Nazis, not the least of whom is my own son, Helmut, currently under apprenticeship in Burgundy. I love him dearly, but what a bother he is sometimes. What a family! Those six kids were more trouble than the French underground. But I digress.

These youngsters are always asking why we didn't launch an A-Bomb attack on

New York City when we had the bomb before America did. If only they would read more! The explanation is self-evident to anyone acquainted with the facts. Today's youth has grown up surrounded by a phalanx of missiles tipped with H-bomb calling cards. They have no notion of how close we were to defeat. The allies had seized Peenemunde. We were lucky to have a few V-2s hidden away. The scientists and engineers were only able to provide us with some crude prototype A-Bombs. There wasn't even time to test one. We used all three — two against the invading armies; the third we threw at London, praying that some sympathetic Valkyrie would help guide it on its course so it would come somewhere near the target. The result was more than we had hoped for.

The letter explained all this and also went into considerable detail on the technical reasons preventing a strike on New York. Admittedly we had developed a long range bomber for the purpose. It was ready within a month of our turning back the invasion. But there were no more A-Bombs to be deployed at that moment. Our intelligence reported that America's Manhattan project was about to bear its fiery fruit. That's when the negotiations began. We much preferred the Americans teaching Japan (loyal ally though it had been) a lesson rather than making an atomic deposit on our shores. Besides, the war between us had truly reached a stalemate, our U-Boats against their aircraft carriers; and each side's bombers against the other's. One plan was to deliver an atomic rocket from a submarine against America . . . but by then both sides were suing for peace. I still believe we made the best policy under the circumstances.

What would the young critics prefer? Nuclear annihilation? They may not appreciate that we live in an age of detente, but such are the cruel realities. We Nazis never intended to subjugate decadent America anyway. Ours was a European vision. Dominating the world is fine, but actually trying to administer the entire planet would be clearly self defeating. No-body could be that crazy . . . except for a Bolshevik, perhaps.

Facts have a tendency to show through

the haze of even the best propaganda, no matter how effectively the myth would screen off unpleasanties. So it is that my daughter, the idealist of the German Freedom League, is not critical of our Russian policy. Why should it be otherwise? She worries about freedom for citizens, and gives the idea of freedom for a serf no more thought than the actual Russian serf gives it. Which is to say none at all.

ONCE AGAIN my Feuhrer calls me. And I was so certain all that was over. They want me at the official opening of the Hitler Memoriam at the museum. His paintings will be there, along with his architectural sketches. And his stuffed Shepherd dogs. And his complete collection of Busby Berkeley movies from America. Ah well, I will have to go.

There is just enough time before departing for me to shower, have some tea, and listen to Beethoven's Pastorale.

December, 1965

I loathe Christmas. It is not that I mind being with my family, but the rest of it is so commercialized, or else syrupy with contemptible Christian sentiments. Now if they could restore the vigor of the original Roman Holiday. Perhaps I should speak to Himmler . . . What am I saying? It isn't worth it.

Helga, my eldest daughter, visited us for a week. She is a geneticist. Currently she is working on a paper to show the limitations of our eugenic policies, and to demonstrate the possibilities opened up by genetic engineering. All this is over my head. DNA, RNA, microbiology, and *literal* supermen in the end? When Hitler said to let the technical side move in any direction it chooses, he was not saying much. There seems no way to stop them.

There is an old man in the neighborhood who belongs to the Nordic cult, body and soul. He and I spoke last week, all the time watching youngsters ice skating under a startlingly blue afternoon sky. There was almost a fairy-tale like quality about the scene, as this old fellow told me in no uncertain terms that this science business is so much fertilizer. "The only great scien-

tist I've ever seen was Horbiger," he announced proudly. "And he was more than a scientist. He was of the true blood, and held the true historical vision."

I didn't have the heart to tell him that the way in which Horbiger was more than a scientist was in his mysticism. Horbiger was useful to us in his day, and one of Himmler's prophets. But the man's cosmogony was utterly discredited by our scientists. Speer's technical Germany has a low tolerance for hoaxes.

This old man would hear none of it at any rate. He still believed every sacred pronouncement. "When I look up at the moon," he told me in a confidential whisper, "I know what I am seeing." *Green cheese*, I thought to myself, but I was aware of what was coming next.

"You still believe that the moon is made of ice?" I asked him.

"It is the truth," he announced gravely, suddenly affronted as though my tone had given me away. "Horbiger proved it," he said with finality.

Horbiger said it, I thought to myself. So that's all you need for "proof." I left the eccentric to his idle speculations on the meaning of the universe. I had to get back to one of my books. It had been languishing in the typewriter too long.

Frau Goebbels was in a sufficiently charitable mood come Christmas to invite the entire neighborhood over. I felt that I was about to live through another endless procession of representatives of the German nation — all the pomp of a funeral without any fun. The old eccentric was invited as well. I was just as happy that he did not come. Arguing about Horbiger is not my favorite pastime.

Speer and his wife dropped by. Mostly he wanted to talk about von Braun and the moon project. Since we had put up the first satellite, the Americans were working around the clock to beat us to luna and restore their international prestige. As far as I was concerned, propaganda would play the deciding role on world opinion (as always). This was an area in which America had always struck me as deficient.

I listened politely to Speer's worries, and finally pointed out that the United States wouldn't be in the position it currently held

if so many of our rocketry people hadn't defected at the end of the war. "It seems to be a race between their German scientists and ours," I said with a hearty chuckle.

Speer did not seem amused. He replied with surprising coldness that Germany would be better off if we hadn't lost so many of our Jewish geniuses when Hitler came to power. I swallowed hard on my bourbon, and perhaps Speer saw consternation on my face, because he was immediately trying to smooth things over with me. Speer is no idealist, but one hell of an expert in his field. I look upon him as I would a well kept piece of machinery. I hope no harm ever comes to it.

Speer always seems to have up-to-date information on all sorts of interesting subjects. He had just learned that an investigation of many years had been dropped with regard to a missing German geneticist, Richard Dietrich. Since this famous scientist had vanished only a few years after the conclusion of the war, the authorities supposed he had either defected to the Americans in secret or had been kidnapped. After two decades of fruitless inquiry, a department decides to cut off funds for the search. I'm sure that a few detectives had made a lucrative career out of the job. Too bad for them.

Magda and I spent part of the holidays returning to my birthplace on the Rhineland. I like to see the old homestead from time to time. I'm happy it hasn't been turned into a damned shrine as happened with Hitler's childhood home. Looking at reminders of the past in a dry, flaky snowfall — brittle, yet seemingly endless, the same as time itself — I couldn't help but wonder what the future holds. Space travel. Genetic engineering. Ah, I am an old man. I feel it in my bones.

May, 1966

I have been invited to Burgundy. My son Helmuth has passed his initiation and is now a fully accredited student of the SS, on his way to joining the inner circle. Naturally he is in a celebratory mood and wants his father to witness the victory. I am proud, of course, but just a little wary of what his future holds in store. I remain

the convinced ideologue, and critical of the bourgeois frame of mind. (Our revolution was against that sort of sentimentality.) But I don't mind some bourgeois comforts. My son will live a hard and austere life that I hope will not prove too much for him.

No sooner had I been sent the invitation than I also received a telegram from my daughter, Hilda, who I had not seen since the Yule Tide when she stopped by for Christmas dinner. Somehow she had learned of the invitation from Helmuth and insisted that I must see her before leaving on the trip. She told me that I was in danger! The message was clouded in mystery because she did not even offer a hint of a reason. Nevertheless I agreed to meet her at the proposed rendezvous because it was conveniently on the way. And I am always worried that Hilda will find herself in jail for going too far with her unrealistic views.

The same evening I was cleaning out a desk when I came across a letter Hilda had written when she was seventeen years old — from the summer of 1952. I had the urge to read it again:

Dear Father:

I appreciated your last letter and its frankness, although I don't understand the point you made. Why have you not been able to think of anything to say to me for nearly a year? I know that you and Mother have found me to be your most difficult daughter. An example comes to mind: Helga, Holly and Hedda never gave Mother trouble about their clothes. I didn't object to the dresses she put on me, but could I help it if they were torn when I played? It simply seemed to me that more casual attire suited climbing trees and hiking and playing soccer.

From the earliest age I can remember, I've always thought boys had more fun than girls because they get to play all those wonderful games. I didn't want to be left out! Why did that make Mother so upset that she cried?

Ever since Heide died in that automobile accident, Mother has become very protective of her daughters. Only Helmuth escaped that sort of overwhelming protectiveness, and that's just because he's a

boy.

At first I wasn't sure that I wanted to be sent to this private school, but a few weeks here convinced me that you had made the right decision. The mountains give you room to stretch your legs. The horses they let us have are magnificent. Wolfgang is mine and he is absolutely the fastest. I'm sure of it.

Soon I will be ready to take my examinations for the university. Your concern that I do well runs through your entire letter. Now we have something to talk about again. At this point it is too late to worry. I'm sure I'll do fine. I've been studying chemistry every chance I get and love it.

My only complaint is that the library is much too small. My favorite book is the unexpurgated Nietzsche, where he talks about the things the party forbade as subjects of public discussion. At first I was surprised to discover how pro-Jewish he was, not to mention pro-freedom. The more I read of him, the more I understand his point of view.

One lucky development was a box of new books that had been confiscated from unauthorized people (what you would call the wrong type for intellectual endeavor, Father). Suddenly I had in front of me an orgy of exciting reading material. I especially enjoyed the Kafka . . . but I'm not sure why.

Some other students here want to form a club. They are in correspondence with others of our peer group who are allowed to read the old forbidden books. We have not decided on what we would call the organization. We are playing with the idea of the German Reading League. Other titles may occur to us later.

Another reason I like it better in the country than in the city is that there are not as many rules out here. Oh, the school has its curfews and other nonsense but they don't really pay much attention and we can do what we please most of the time. Only one of the teachers doesn't like me and she called me a little reprobate. I suspect she might make trouble for me except that everyone knows that you're my Father. That has always helped.

I was becoming interested in a boy named Franz but it came to the dean's at-

tention and she told me that he was not from a good enough family for me to pursue the friendship. I ignored the advice but within a month Franz had left without saying a word. I know that you are against the old class boundaries, Father, but believe me when I say that they are still around.

Now that I think about it, there are more rules out here than I first realized. Why must there be so many rules?

Why can't I just be me without causing so much trouble?

Well, I don't want to end this letter with a question. I hope you and Mother are happy. You should probably take that vacation you keep telling everyone will be any year now! I want to get those post cards from Hong Kong!

Love, Hilda

I SAT AT THE desk and thought about my daughter. I had to admit that she was my favorite and always had been. Where had I gone wrong with her? How had her healthy radicalism become channeled in such an unproductive direction? There was more to it than just the books. It was something in her. I was looking forward to seeing her again.

On a Wednesday morning I boarded a luxury train; the power of the rocket engines is deliberately held down so that passengers may enjoy the scenery instead of merely rushing through. I would be meeting Hilda in a small French hamlet directly in line with my final destination. I took along a manuscript — work, always work — this diary, and, for relaxation, a mystery novel by and Englishman. What is it about the British that makes this genre uniquely their own?

Speaking of books, I noticed a rotund gentleman — very much the Goering type — reading a copy of my pre-war novel, *Michael*. I congratulated him on his excellent taste and he recognized me immediately. As I was autographing his copy, he asked if I were doing any new novels. I explained that I found plays and movie scripts a more comfortable form with which to work and suggested he see my filmed sequel to *The Wanderer* the next time he was in New Berlin. I've never had any trouble living with the fact that my

name is a household word. It makes me a toastmaster much in demand.

I contemplated the numerous ways in which my wife's social calendar would keep her occupied in my absence. Since the children have grown up and left home, she seems more active than before! It's amazing the number of things she can find to do in a day. I would have liked to attend the Richard Strauss concert with her but duty calls.

The food on the train was quite good. The wine was only adequate, however. I had high hopes that that French hamlet would live up to its reputation for prime vintages.

The porter on the train looked Jewish to me. Probably is. There are people of Jewish ancestry living in Europe. It doesn't matter, so long as the practicing Jew is forever removed. God, we made the blood flow to cleanse this soil. Of course I'm speaking figuratively. Gas and fire are so much more hygienic than messy techniques of death and disposal, especially when dealing on a mass scale.

We reached the station at dusk and my daughter was waiting for me. She is such a lovely child, except that she is no child any longer! I can see why she has so many admirers. Her political activities (if they even deserve such a label) have not made her any the less attractive. She has the classic features. On her thirtieth birthday I once again brought up the subject of why she had never married. Oh, I am aware that she has many lovers. Not as many as her father, but still a respectable number. The question is: Can that be enough? That she may never reproduce vexes me greatly. As always, her deep-throated laugh mocks my concern.

A few seconds after I disembarked she was pulling at my sleeve and rushing me to a cab. I had never seen her looking so agitated. We virtually ran through the lobby of my hotel, and I felt as though I were under some type of house arrest as she hustled me up to my room and bolted the door behind us.

"Father," she said almost breathlessly. "I have terrible news." I found the melodramatic derring-do a trifle annoying. After all, I had put those days firmly behind

me (or so I thought). Leave intrigues to the young, I always say . . . suddenly remembering in that case my daughter still qualifies for numerous adventures. If only she would leave me out of it!

"My darling," I said, "I am tired from my trip and in want of a bath. Surely your message can wait until after I am changed? Over dinner we may . . ."

"No," she announced sternly. "It can't wait."

"Very well," I said, recognizing that my ploy had failed miserably and surrendering to her — shall we say — blitzkrieg. "Tell me," I said as I sat in a chair.

"You must not go to Burgundy," she began, and then paused as though anticipating an outburst from me. I am a master at that game. I told her to get on with it.

"Father, you may think me mad when I am finished, but I must tell you!" A chip off the old block, I thought. I nodded assent, if only to get it over with.

She was pacing as she spoke: "First of all, the German Freedom League has learned something that could have the worst consequences for the future of our country." I did not attempt to mask my expression of disgust but she plowed on regardless. "Think whatever you will of the League, but facts are facts. And we have uncovered the most diabolical secret."

"Which is?" I prompted her, expecting something anti-climatic.

"I am sure that you have not the slightest inkling of this, but during the war millions of Jews were put to death in gas chambers. What we thought were concentration camps suffering from typhus infections and lacking supplies, were in reality death camps at which was carried out a systematic program of genocide."

The stunned expression on my face was no act. My daughter interpreted it as befitted her love for me — she took it, if you will, at face value.

"I can see that you're shocked," she said. "Even though you staged those public demonstrations against the Jews, I realize that was the force the Nazi Party's emigration policy through. I detest that policy, but it wasn't murder."

"Dear," I said, trying to keep my voice even, "what you are telling me is nothing

more than thoroughly discredited Allied propaganda. There has never been any evidence to . . ."

"There is now," she said, and I believe that my jaw dropped at the revelation. She went on, oblivious to my horror: "The records that were kept for those camps are all forgeries. A separate set of records, detailing the genocide, has been uncovered by the League."

What a damnably stupid German thing to do. To keep records of *everything*. I knew it had to be true. It was as if my daughter disappeared from the room at that second. I could still see her, but only in a fuzzy way. A far more solid form stood between us, the image of the man who had been my life. It was as if the ghost of Adolf Hitler stood before me then, in our common distress, in our common deed. I could hear his voice and remember my promise to him. Oh God, it was my own daughter who was to provide the test. I really had not the least desire to see her eliminated. I liked her.

What I said next was not entirely in keeping with my feigned ignorance, and if she had been less upset she might have noticed the implications of my remark as I asked her: "Hilda, how many people have you told?"

She answered without hesitation. "Only members of the League and now you." I heaved a sigh of relief.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to keep this extreme theory to yourself?" I asked.

"It's no theory. It's a fact. And I have no intention of advertising this. It would make me a target for those lunatics in the SS."

So that was the Burgundy connection! I still didn't see why I should be in any danger during my trip to Burgundy. Even if I were innocent of the truth — which every SS official knew to be absurd, since I was an architect of the genocide — my sheer prominence in the Nazi Party would keep me safe from harm in Burgundy.

I asked my daughter what this fancy of hers had to do with my impending trip. "Only everything," she answered.

"Are you afraid that they will suspect I've learned of this so-called secret, which is nothing more than patent nonsense to

begin with?"

She surprised me by answering, "No." There was an executioner's silence.

"What then?" I asked.

"It is not this crime of the past that endangers you," came the sound of her voice in portentous tones. "It is a crime of the future."

"You should have been the poet of the family."

"If you go to Burgundy, you risk your life. They are planning a new crime against humanity that will make World War II and the death camps seem like nothing but a prelude. And you will be one of their first victims!"

Never have I felt more acutely the pain of a father for his off-spring. I could not help but conclude that my youngest daughter's mind had only a tenuous connection to reality. Her political activities must be to blame! On the other hand, I regarded Hilda with a genuine affection. She seemed concerned for my welfare in a manner I supposed would not apply to a stranger. The decadent creed she had embraced had not led to any disaffection from her father.

I thought back to the grand old days of intrigue within the Party and the period in the war years when I referred most often to that wise advice of Machiavelli: "Cruelties should be committed all at once, as in that way each separate one is less felt, and gives less offence." We had come perilously close to *Gottterdammerung* then, but in the end our policy proved sound. I was beyond all that. The state was secure, Europe was secure . . . and the only conceivable threat to my safety would come from foreign sources. Yet here was Hilda, her face a mixture of concern and anger and — perhaps love? She was telling me to beware the Burgundians! She had as much as accused them of plotting against the German Reich.

I remember how they had invited me to one of the conferences to decide the formation of the new nation of Burgundy. Those were hectic times in the post war period. As *Gauleiter* of Berlin (one of the Fuehrer's few appointments of that title with which I always approved) I had been primarily concerned with Speer's work to

build New Berlin. The film industry was flowering under my personal supervision, I was busy writing my memoirs, and I was involved heavily with diplomatic projects. I hadn't really given Burgundy much thought. I knew that it had been a country in medieval times, and had read a little about the Duchy of Burgundy. I remembered that the historical country had traded in grain, wines and finished wool.

They announced at the conference that the historical Burgundy would be restored, encompassing the area to the south of Champagne, east of Bourbonnais, and north and west of Savoy.

There was some debate on whether or not to restore the original place names or else borrow from Wagner to create a series of new ones. In the end, the latter camp won out. The capital was named Tarnhelm, after the magic helmet in the *Nibelungenlied* that could change the wearer into a variety of shapes.

Hitler did not officially single out any of the departments that made up the SS: Waffen, Death's Head or the General SS. We in his entourage realized, however, that the gift was to those members of the inner circle who had been most intimately involved with both the ideological and practical side of the extermination program. The true believers! Given the Reich's policy of secrecy, there was no need to blatantly advertise the reasons for the gift. Himmler, as *Feichsfuhrer* of the SS and Hitler's advisor on racial matters, was naturally instrumental in this transfer of power to the new nation.

The officials selected to oversee the creation of Burgundy were very carefully selected. Their mission was to make certain than Burgundy became a unique nation in all of Europe, devoted to certain chivalric values of the past, and the formation of pure Aryan specimens. It was nothing more than the logical extension of our propaganda, the secularizing of the myths and legends with which we had kept the people fed during the dark days of lost hope. The final result was a picturesque fairy tale kingdom that made its money almost entirely out of the tourist trade. America loves to boast of its amusement parks but it has nothing to match this.

Hilda interrupted my reverie by asking me in a voice bordering on sternness: "Well, what are you going to do?"

"Unless you make sense, I will continue on my journey to Tarnhelm to see Helmuth." He was living at the headquarters of the SS leaders, the territory that was closed off to outsiders, even during the tourist season. Yet it was by no means unusual for occasional visitors from New Berlin to be invited there. My daughter's melodramatics did not give me cause to worry. All I could think of was how I'd like to get my hands around the throat of whoever put these idiotic notions in her pretty head.

She was visibly distressed, but in control. She tossed her hair back and said, "I am not sure that the proof I have to offer will be sufficient to convince you."

"Aren't you getting ahead of yourself?" I asked. "You haven't even made a concrete accusation yet! Drop this pose. Tell me what you think constitutes the danger."

"They think you're a traitor," she said.

"What?" I was astounded to hear such words from anyone for any reason. "To Germany?"

"No," she answered. "To the true Nazi ideal."

I laughed. "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard. I'm one of the key . . ."

"You don't understand," she interrupted. "I'm talking about the religion."

"Oh, Hilda, is that all? You and your group have stumbled upon some threatening comments from the Thule Society, I take it?"

Now it was her turn to be surprised. She sat upon the bed. "Yes," she answered. "But then you know . . .?"

"The specifics? Not at all. They change their game every few months. Who has the time to keep up? Let me tell you something. The leaders of the SS have always had ties to an occult group called the Thule Society, but there is nothing surprising about that. It is a purely academic exercise in playing with the occult, the same as the British equivalent — The Golden Dawn. I'm sure you're aware that many prominent Englishmen belonged to that club!

"These people are always harmless ec-

centrics. Our movement made use of the type without stepping on pet beliefs. It's the same as dealing with any religious person whom you want to be on your side. If you receive cooperation, it won't be through insulting his spiritual beliefs."

"What about the messages we intercepted?" she went on. "The threatening tone, the almost deranged . . ."

"It's how they entertain themselves!" I insisted. "Listen, you're familiar with Horbiger, aren't you?" She nodded. "Burgundians believe that stuff. Even after the launching of von Braun's satellite which in no way disturbed the eternal ice, as that old fool predicted! His followers don't care about facts. Hell, they still believe the moon in our sky is the fourth moon this planet has had, that it is made of ice like the other three, that all of the cosmos is an eternal struggle of fire and ice. Even our Fuehrer toyed with those ideas in the old days. The Burgundians no more want to give up their sacred ideas merely because modern science has exploded them, than fundamentalist Baptists in America want to listen to Darwin."

"I know," she said. "You are acting as though they aren't dangerous."

"They're not!"

"Soon Helmuth will be accepted into the inner circle."

"Why not? He's been working for that ever since he was a teenager."

"But the inner circle," she repeated with added emphasis.

"So he'll be a Hitler Youth for the rest of his life. He'll never grow up."

"You don't understand."

"I'm tired of this conversation," I told her bluntly. "Do you remember several years ago when your brother went on that pilgrimage to Lower Saxony to one of Himmler's shrines? You were terribly upset but you didn't have a shred of reason why he shouldn't have gone. You had nightmares. Your mother and I wondered if it was because as a little girl you were frightened by Wagner."

"Now I have reasons."

"Mysterious threatening messages! The Thule Society! It should be taken with a grain of salt. I saw Adolf Hitler once listen to a harangue from an especially unrealis-

tic believer in the Nordic cult, bow solemnly when the man was finished, enter his private office — where I accompanied him — and break out in laughter that would wake the dead. He didn't want to offend the fellow. The man was a good Nazi, at least."

My daughter was fishing around in her purse as I told her these things. She passed me a piece of paper when I was finished. I unfolded it and read:

**JOSEPH GOEBBELS MUST ARRIVE
ON SCHEDULE FOR THE RITUAL
IT MUST BE PERFECTLY TIMED
HE WILL NEVER TELL ANYONE**

"What is this?" I asked her. I was becoming angry.

"A member of the Freedom League intercepted a message from Burgundy to someone in New Berlin. It was coded, but we were able to break it."

"To whom was the message addressed?"

"To Heinrich Himmler."

Suddenly I felt very, very cold. I had never trusted *der treue Heinrich*. Admittedly I didn't trust anything that came from the German Freedom League, with a contradiction built into its very title. Nevertheless, something in me was clawing at the pit of my stomach. Something told me that maybe, just maybe, there was danger after all. Crazy as Himmler had been during the war years, he had become much worse in peace time. At least he was competent regarding the Final Solution.

"How do I know that this note is genuine?" I asked.

"You don't," she answered. "I had to take a great risk in bringing it to you, if that helps you to believe."

"The Burgundians would have stopped you?"

"If they knew about it. I was referring to the German Freedom League. They hate you as much as the rest of them."

My face flushed with anger and I jumped to my feet so abruptly that it put an insupportable strain on my club foot. I had to grab for a nearby lamp to keep from stumbling. "Why," I virtually hissed, "do you belong to that despicable bunch of bums and poseurs?"

She stood also, picking up her purse as she did so. "Father, I am going. You may do with this information as you wish. I will offer one last suggestion. Why don't you take another comfortable passenger train back to New Berlin, and call Tarnhelm to say that you will be one day late? See what their reaction is? You didn't manage to attend my college graduation and I'm none the worse for it. Would it matter so much to my brother were you to help him celebrate after the ceremony?"

She turned to go. "Wait," I said. "I'm sorry I spoke so harshly. You mean well."

"We've been through this before," she answered, her back still to me.

"I don't see any harm in doing what you suggest. If it will make you happy, I'll delay the trip."

"Thank you," she said, and walked out. I watched the closed door for several minutes, not moving, not really thinking.

A half hour later I was back at the railroad station, boarding an even slower passenger train back to New Berlin. I love this sort of travel. The rocket engines were held down to their minimum output. The straining hum they made only accentuated the fact of their great power held in check.

With my state of mind in such turmoil I could not do any serious work. I decided to relax and resumed reading the English mystery novel. I had narrowed it down to three suspects, all members of the aristocracy, naturally — all highly offensive people. The servant I had ruled out as much too obvious. As is typical of the form, a few key sentences give up the solution if you know what they are. I had just passed over what I took to be such a phrase, and returned to it. Looking up from my book to contemplate the puzzle, I noticed that the woman sitting across from me was also reading a book, a French title that seemed vaguely familiar: *Le Theosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion* by Rene Guenon.

I looked back to my book when I suddenly noticed that the train was slowing down. There was no reason for it, as we were far from our next stop. Looking out the window, I saw nothing but wooded landscape under a starry night sky. A tall man up the aisle was addressing the por-

ter. His rather lengthy monologue boiled down to a simple question: why was there the delay? The poor official was shaking his head with bewilderment and indicated that he would move forward to inquire. That's when I noticed the gas.

It was yellow. It was seeping in from the air conditioning system. Like everyone else I started to get up in hopes of finding a means of egress. Already I was coughing. As I turned to the window, with the idea of releasing the emergency lock, I slipped back down into the cushions as consciousness fled. The last thing I remember was seriously regretting that I had not found the time to sample a glass of wine from that hamlet.

I must have dreamed. I was standing alone in the middle of a great lake, frozen over in the dead of winter. I was not dressed for the weather but had on only my party uniform. I looked down at the icy expanse at my feet and noticed that my boots were freshly shined, the luster already becoming covered by flakes of snow. I heard the sound of hoofbeats echoing hollowly on the ice, and looked up to see a small army on horseback approaching. I recognized them immediately. They were the Teutonic Knights. The dark armor, the stern faces, the great, black horses, the bright lances and swords and shields. They could be nothing else.

They did not appear to be friendly. I started walking away from them. The sound of their approach was a thunder pounding at my brain. I cursed my lameness, cursed my inability to fly, suddenly found myself suspended in the air, and then I had fallen on the ice, skinning my knees. Struggling to turn over, I heard a blood curdling yell and they were all around me. There was a whooshing of blades in the still, icy air. I was screaming. Then I was trying to reason with them.

"I helped Germany win the war . . . I believe in the Aryan race . . . I helped destroy the Jews . . ." But I knew it was to no avail. They were killing me. The swords plunged in deeply.

I AWAKENED aboard a small jet flying in the early dawn. For a moment I thought I was tied to my seat. When I glanced to see

what kind of cords had my wrists bound to the arms of the chair, I saw that I was mistaken. The feeling of constriction I attributed to the effects of the gas. Painfully I lifted a hand . . . then with even more anguish I raised my head, noticing that the compartment was empty except for me. The door to the cockpit was closed.

The most difficult task that confronted me was to turn my head to the left so that I could have a better view of our location. A dozen tiny needles pricked at the muscles in my neck but I succeeded. I was placed near the wing and could see a good portion of the countryside unfolding like a map beneath it. We were over a run-down railroad station. One last bit of track snaked on beyond it for about half a mile — we seemed flying almost parallel to it — when it suddenly stopped, blocked off by a tremendous oak tree, the size of which was noticeable even from the great height.

I knew where we were immediately. We had just flown over the eastern border of Burgundy.

I leaned back in my seat, attempting to have my muscles relax, but met with little success. They stubbornly insisted on having their way despite my *will* that they be otherwise. I was terribly thirsty. I assumed that if I stood I would have a serious dizzy spell, so I called out instead: "Steward!" No sooner was the word out of my mouth than a young, blonde man in a spotless white jacket came up behind me holding a small, fancy menu.

"What would you like?" he asked.

"An explanation."

"I'm afraid that is not on this menu. I'm sure you will find what you seek when we reach our destination. In the meantime, would you care to dine?"

"No," I said, relapsing back into the depths of my seat, terribly tired again.

"Some coffee?" the steward asked, persisting.

I assented to this. It was very good coffee and soon I was feeling better. Looking out the window again, I observed that we were over a lake. There was a long-ship plying the clear, blue water — its dragon's head glared at the horizon. My son had written me about the Viking Club when he first took up residence in Burgundy. This

had to be one of their outings.

Thirty minutes and two cups of coffee later the intercom announced that we would be landing at Tarnhelm. From the air the view was excellent: several monasteries — now devoted to SS training as *Ordensburgen* — were situated near the village that housed the Russian serfs. Beyond that was still another lake and then came the imposing castle in which I knew I would find my son.

There was a narrow landing strip within the castle grounds and the pilot was every bit the professional. We hadn't been down longer than five minutes when who should enter the plane but my son, Helmuth! I looked at him. He had blonde hair and blue eyes. The only trouble was that my son did not have blonde hair and blue eyes. Of course I knew that the hair could be dyed, but somehow it looked quite authentic. As for the eyes, I could think of no explanation but for contact lenses. Helmuth had also lost weight and never appeared more muscular or healthy than he did now.

Here I was, surrounded by mystery — angry, bewildered, unsettled. And yet the first thing that escaped my lips was: "Helmuth, what's happened to you?" He guessed my meaning.

"This is real blonde hair," he said proudly. "And the eye color is real as well. I regret that I am not of the true genotype, any more than you are. I was given a hormone treatment to change the color of my hair. A special radiation treatment took care of the eyes."

As he was saying this, he was helping me to my feet, as I was still groggy. "Why?" I asked him. He would say no more about it.

The sun hurt my eyes as we exited down the ramp from the plane. Two tall, young men — also blonde haired and blue eyed — joined my son and helped to usher me inside the castle. They were dressed in Bavarian hunting gear, with large knives strapped on at their waists. Their clothes had the smell of freshest leather.

We had entered from the courtyard of the inner bailey. The hall we traversed was covered in plush red carpets and was illuminated by torches burning in the walls; this cast a weird lighting effect over the numerous suits of armor standing there. I

could not help but think of the medieval castles Speer drew for his children every Christmas.

It was a long trek before we reached a stone staircase that we immediately began to ascend. I was not completely recovered from the effects of the gas and wished that we could pause. My club foot was giving me considerable difficulty. I did not want to show any weakness to these men, and I knew that my sturdy son was right behind me. I took those steps without slowing down the pace.

We finally came out on a floor that was awash in light from fluorescent tubes. A closed circuit television console dominated the center of the room, with pictures of all the other floors of the castle, from the keep to the highest tower.

"Wait here," Helmuth announced, and before I could make any protestations he and the other two had gone the way we had come, with the door locked behind them. I considered the large window on the right side of the room with a comfortable couch beside it. I gratefully sat there and surveyed my position from the new vantage point. Below me was another courtyard. In one corner was what could be nothing else but an unused funeral pyre. Its height was staggering. There was no body upon it. Along the wall that ran from the pyre to the other end of the compound were letters inscribed of a size easy to read even from such distance. It was a familiar quotation: ANY DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION, MISSION, AND STRUCTURE OF THE SS CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD UNLESS ONE TRIES TO CONCEIVE IT INWARDLY WITH ONE'S BLOOD AND HEART. IT CANNOT BE EXPLAINED WHY WE CONTAIN SO MUCH STRENGTH, ALTHOUGH WE NUMBER SO FEW. Underneath the quote in equally large letters was the name of its author: HEINRICH HIMMLER.

"A statement that you know well," came a low voice behind me and I turned to face Kurt Kaufmann, the most important man in Burgundy. I had met him a few times socially in New Berlin.

Smiling in as engaging a manner as I could (under the circumstances), I said,

"Kurt," stressing that I was not addressing him formally, "I have no idea why you have seemingly kidnapped me, but there will be hell to pay!"

He bowed. "What you fail to appreciate, Dr. Goebbels, is that I will receive that payment."

I studied his face — the bushy blonde hair and beard, and of course the bright blue eyes. The monocle he wore over one of them seemed quite superfluous. I knew that he had 20/20 vision.

"I have no idea what you are talking about."

"You lack ideas, it is true," he answered. "Of facts you do not lack. We knew your daughter contacted you . . ."

Even at the time this dialogue struck me as remarkably melodramatic. Nevertheless it was happening to me. At the mention of my daughter I failed to mask my feelings. Kaufmann had to notice the expression of consternation on my face. The whole affair was turning into a hideous game that I feared I was losing.

I stood. "My daughter's associations with a subversive political group are well known." There was no reason to mince words with him. "I was attempting to dissuade her from a suicidal course. Why would you be spying on that?"

The ploy failed miserably. "We bugged the room," he said softly.

"You dare to spy on me? Have you any idea of the danger?"

"Yes," he said. "You don't."

I made to comment but he raised a hand to silence me. "Do not continue. Soon you will have more answers than you desire. Now I suggest you follow me."

The room had many doors. We left through one at the opposite end from my original point of entry. I was walking down yet another hall. This one, however, was lit by electricity, and at the end of it we entered an elevator. The contrast between modern technology and Burgundian simplicity was becoming more jarring all the time. Like most Germans who had visited the country, I only knew it firsthand as a tourist. The reports I had once received on their training operations were not as detailed as I would have liked but certainly gave no hint of dire conspiracy against the

Fatherland. The thought was too fantastic to credit. Even now I hoped for a denouement more in keeping with the known facts. Could the entire thing be an elaborate practical joke? Who would run the risk of such a folly?

The elevator doors opened and we were looking out onto the battlements of the castle. I followed Kaufmann onto the walk, and noticed that the view was utterly magnificent. To the left I saw young Burgundians doing calisthenics in the warm morning air. I was used to observing many blonde heads in the SS. Yet here there was nothing but that suddenly predictable homogeneity.

We looked down at the young bodies. Beyond them other young men were dressed in chain mail shirts and helmets. They were having at one another with the most intensive swordplay I had ever witnessed.

"Isn't that a bit dangerous?" I asked Kaufmann, gesturing at the fencing.

"What do you mean?" he said, as one of the men ran his sword through the chest of another. The blood spurted out in a fountain as the body slumped to the ground. I was aghast, and Kaufmann's voice seemed to be far away as I dimly heard it say: "Did you notice how the loser did not scream? That is what I call discipline." It occurred to me that the man might have simply died too quickly to express his opinion.

Kaufmann seemed wryly amused by my wan expression. "Dr. Goebbels, do you remember the *Kirchenkampf*?"

I recovered my composure. "The campaign against the churches? What about it?"

"Martin Bormann was disappointed in its failure," he said.

"No more than I. The war years allowed little time for less important matters. You know that the economic policies we established after the war helped to undermine the strength of the churches. They have never been weaker."

"They still exist," said Kaufmann evenly. "The gods of the Germanic tribes are not fools — their indignation is as great as ever!" I stared at this man with amazement as he continued to preach: "The gods remember how Roman missionaries built

early Christian churches on the sacred sites, believing that the common people would still climb the same hills they always had to worship . . . only now they would pay homage to a false god!"

"The masses are not easily cured of the addiction," I pointed out.

"You compare religion to a drug?"

"It was one of the few wise statements of Marx," I said, with a deliberate edge in my voice. Kaufmann's face quickly darkened into a scowl. "Not all religions are the same," I concluded in an ameliorative a tone as I could manage.

"You say that, but it is only words. Let me tell you a story about yourself, *Herr Goebbels*." I did not consider the sudden formality a good sign, not the way he said it. He continued: "You always prided yourself on being the true radical of the Nazi party. You hammered that home whenever you could. Nobody hated the bourgeoisie more than Goebbels. Nobody was more ardent about burning books than Goebbels. As *Reichspropagandaminister* you brilliantly staged the demonstrations against the Jews."

Now the man was making sense. I volunteered another item to his admirable list: "I overheard some young men humming the Horst Wessel song down there during calisthenics." Manufacturing a martyr to give the party its anthem was still one of my favorites. My influence was still on the Germanic world, including Burgundy.

Kaufmann had been surveying rows of men doing push-ups . . . as well as the removal of the corpse from the tourney field. Now his stone face turned in my direction, breaking into an unpleasant smile. I preferred his frown. "You misunderstand the direction of my comments, *Herr Doktor*. I will clarify it. I was told a story about you once. I was only a simple soldier at the time but the story made an indelible impression. You were at a party, showing off for your friends by making four brief political speeches: the first presented the case for the restoration of the monarchy; the second sung the praises of the Weimar Republic; the third proved how Communism could be successfully adopted by the German Reich; the fourth was in favor of National Socialism, at last. How relieved they

were. How tempted they had been to agree with each of the other three speeches."

I could not believe what I was hearing. How could this dull oaf be in charge of anything but a petty bureaucratic department? Had he no sense of humor, no irony? "I was demonstrating the power of propaganda," I told him.

"In what do you believe?" he asked.

"This is preposterous," I nearly shouted. "Are you impuning . . ."

"It is not necessary to answer," he said consoling. "I'm aware that you have only believed in one thing in your life: a man, not an idea. With Hitler dead, what is left for you to believe?"

"This is insane," I replied, not liking the shrill sound of my own voice in my ears. "When I was made Reich Director for Total War, I demonstrated my genius for understanding and operating the mechanisms of a dictatorship. I was crucial to the war effort then."

He completely ignored my point and continued on his solitary course: "Hitler was more than a man. He was a living part of an idea. He did not always recognize his own importance. He was chosen by the *Vril Society*, the sacred order of the Luminous Lodge, the purest, finest product of the believers in the Thule. Adolf Hitler was the medium. The Society used him accordingly. He was the focal point. Behind him were powerful magicians. The great work has only begun. Soon it will be time for the second step."

Kaufmann was working himself up, I could see that. He stood close to me and said, "You are a political animal, Goebbels. You believe that politics is an end in itself. The truth is that governments are nothing in the face of destiny. We are near the cleansing of the world. You should be proud. Your own son will play an important part. The finest jest is that modern scientific method will also have a role."

He turned to go. I had no recourse but to follow him. There was nowhere else to go but straight down to sudden death.

We re-entered the elevator. "Have I been brought here to witness an honor bestowed on my son?" I asked.

"In part. You will also have a role. You

saw the telegram!"

That was enough. There could no longer be any doubt. I was trapped amidst madmen. Having made up my mind what to do, I feigned an attack of pain in my club foot and crouched at the same time. When Kaufmann made to offer aid, I struck wildly, almost blindly. I tried to knee him in the groin but — failing that — brought my fist down on the back of his neck. The fool went out like a light, falling hard on his face. I congratulated myself on such prowess for an old man.

No sooner had the body slumped to the floor than the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened automatically. I jumped out into the hall. Standing there was a naked seven foot giant who reached down and lifted me into the air. He was laughing. His voice sounded like a tuba.

"They call me Thor," he said. I struggled but he held.

Then I heard the voice of my son: "That, Father, is what we call a true Aryan."

I was carried like so much baggage down the hall, hearing voices distantly talking about Kaufmann. I was tossed on to the hard floor of a brightly lit room and the door was slammed behind me. A muscle had been pulled in my back and I lay there, gasping in pain like a fish out of water. I could see that I was in some sort of laboratory. In a corner was a humming machine the purpose of which I could not guess. A young woman was standing over me, wearing a white lab smock. I could not help but notice two things about her straight-away: she was a brunette, and she was holding a sword at my throat.

AS I LOOK back, the entire affair has an air of unreality about it. Events were becoming more fantastic in direct proportion to the speed with which they occurred. It had all the logic of a dream.

As I lay upon the floor, under that sword held by such an unlikely guardian (I had always supported military service for women, but when encountering the real thing I found it a bit difficult to take seriously), I began to take an inventory of my pains. The back ache was subsiding so long as I did not move . . . I was becoming aware, however, that the hand with which I

had dispatched Kaufmann felt like a hot balloon of agony, expanding without an upper limit. My vision was blurred and I shook my head trying to clear it. I dimly heard voices in the background, and then a particularly resonant one was near at hand, speaking with complete authority: "Oh, don't be ridiculous. Help him up."

The woman put down the sword, and was suddenly assisted by a young Japanese girl gingerly lifting me off the floor and propelling me in the direction of a nearby chair. Still I did not see the author of that powerful voice.

Then I was sitting down and the females were moving away. The owner of the powerful voice was standing there, his hands on his hips, looking at me with the sort of analytical probing I always respect. At first I didn't recognize him, but had instead the eerie feeling that I was in a movie. The face made me think of something too ridiculous to credit . . . and then I knew who it really was: Professor Dietrich, the missing geneticist. I examined him more closely. My first impression had been more correct than I thought. The man hardly resembled the photographs of his youth. His hair had turned white and he had let it grow. Seeing him in person, I could not help but notice how angular were his features . . . how much like the face of the late actor Rudolf Klein-Rogge in the role of Dr. Mabuse, Fritz Lang's character that had become the symbol of a super scientific, scheming Germany to the rest of the world. Although these films were banned for the average German, the American made series (Mabuse's second life, you could say) had become so popular throughout the world that Reich officials considered it a mark of distinction to own copies of all twenty titles. Since the death of Klein-Rogge, other actors had taken over the part, but always the producers looked for that same startling visage. This man Dietrich was meant for the role.

"What are you staring at?" he asked. I told him. He laughed. "You chose the right profession," he continued. "You have a cinematic imagination. I am flattered by the comparison."

"What is happening?" I asked.

"Much. Not all of it is necessary. This

show they are putting on for your benefit is rather pointless, for instance."

I was becoming comfortable in the chair, and my back had momentarily ceased to annoy me. I hoped that I would not have to move for still another guided tour of something I wasn't sure that I wanted to see. To my relief, Dietrich pulled up a chair, sat down across from me and started talking:

"I expect that Kaufmann meant to introduce you to Thor when the elevator doors opened and then enjoy your startled expression as you were escorted down the hall to my laboratory. They didn't think you'd improvise on the set! Well, they're only amateurs and you are the expert when it comes to good, silly melodrama."

"Thor . . ." I began lamely, but could think of nothing to say.

"He's not overly intelligent. I'm impressed that he finished the scene with such dispatch. I apologize for my assistant. She had been watching the entire thing on one of our monitors and must have come to the conclusion that you are a dangerous fellow. In person, I mean. We all know what you are capable of in an official capacity."

As we talked, I took in my surroundings. The size of the laboratory was tremendous. It was like being in a scientific warehouse. Although without technical training myself, I noticed that there seemed to be a lack of systematic arrangement: materials were jumbled together in a downright sloppy fashion, even if there were a good reason for the close proximity of totally different apparatuses. Nevertheless I realized that I was out of my depth and I might be having nothing more than an aesthetic response.

"They closed the file on you," I said. I thought you had been kidnapped by American agents."

"That was the cover story."

"Then you were kidnapped by the Burgundians?"

"A reasonable deduction, but wrong. I volunteered."

"For what?"

"Dr. Goebbels, I said that you have a cinematic imagination. That is good. It will help you to appreciate this." He snapped his fingers and the Japanese girl was by his

side so swiftly that I didn't see where she had come from. She was holding a small plastic box. He opened it and showed me the interior: two cylinders, each with a tiny suction cup on the end. He took one out. "Examine this," he said, passing it to me.

"One of your inventions?" I asked, noticing that it was as light as if it were made out of tissue paper. But I could tell that whatever the material was, it was sturdy.

"A colleague came up with that," he told me. "He's dead now, unfortunately. Politics." He retrieved the cylinder, did something with the untipped end, then stood. "It won't hurt," he said. "If you will cooperate, I promise a cinematic experience unlike anything you've ever sampled."

There was no point in resisting. They had me. Whatever their purpose, I was in no position to oppose it. Nor is there any denying that my curiosity was aroused by this seeming toy.

Dietrich leaned forward, saying, "Allow me to attach this to your head and you will enjoy a unique production of the Burgundian Propaganda Ministry, if you will — the story of my life."

Without further ado, he pressed the small suction cup against the center of my forehead. There was a tingling sensation and then my sight began to dim! I knew that my eyes were still open and I had not lost consciousness. For a moment I feared that I was going blind.

There were new images. I began to dream while wide awake, except that they were not my dreams. They were someone else's!

I was someone else!

I was Dietrich . . . as a child.

I was buttoning my collar on a cold day in February before going to school. The face that looked back from the mirror had a cherubic — almost beautiful — aspect. I was happy to be who I was.

As I skipped down cobbled streets it suddenly struck me with solemn force that I was a Jew.

My German parents had been strict, orthodox and humorless. An industrial accident had taken them from me. I was not to be alone for long. An uncle in Spain had sent for me and I went to live there. He had

become a gentile (not without difficulty) but was able to take a child from a practicing Jewish family into his household.

It did not take more than a few days at school for the beatings to begin, whereupon they increased with ferocity. There was a bubbling fountain in easy distance of the schoolyard where I went to wash away the blood.

One day I watched the water turn crimson over the rippling reflection of my scarred face. I decided that whatever it was a Jew was supposed to be, I surely didn't qualify. I had the same color blood as my classmates, after all. Therefore I could not be a real Jew.

I announced this revelation the next day at school and was nearly killed for my trouble. One particularly stupid lad was so distressed by my logic that he expressed his displeasure with a critique made up of a two-by-four. Yet somehow in all this pain and anguish — as I fled for my life — I did not think to condemn the attackers. My conclusion was that surely the Jew must be a monstrous creature indeed to inspire such a display. Cursing the memory of my parents, I felt certain that through some happy fluke I was not really of their flesh and blood.

Amazing as it seems, I became an anti-Semite. I took a star of David to the playground and in full view of my classmates destroyed it. A picture of a rabbi I also burned. Some were not impressed by this display, but others restrained them from resuming the beatings. For the first time I knew security in that schoolyard. None of them became any friendlier; they did not seem to know how to take it.

Suddenly the pictures of Dietrich's early life disappeared into a swirling darkness. I was confused, disoriented.

Time had passed. Now I was Dietrich as a young man back in Germany, dedicating myself to a life's work in genetic research. I joined the Nazi party on the eve of its power, not so much out of vanity as out of a pragmatic reading of the *Zeitgeist*. Naturally I used my Spanish gentile pedigree.

The Nazis were developing their eugenic theories at the time. To say the basis of their programs was at best pseudo-scientific

would still be to compliment it. At best, the only science involved was terminology borrowed from the field of eugenics.

I was doing real research, however, despite the limitations I faced due to party funding and propaganda requirements. My work involved negative eugenics, the study of how to eliminate defective genes from the gene pool through selective breeding. Assuming an entire society could be turned into a laboratory, defective genes could be eliminated in one generation, although the problem might still crop up from time to time because of recessive genes (easily handled).

In deciding to breed something out of the population, the door was opened as to what to breed *for*, or positive eugenics. Now, so long as we were restricting ourselves to a question of a particular genetic disease, we could do something. But even then there were problems. What if some invaluable genius had such a genetic disability? Would you throw out the possibility of his having intelligent off-spring just because of one risk?

Add to this valid concern the deranged, mystical ideas of the Nazi with regard to genetics, and the complications really set in. They wanted to breed for qualities that in many cases fell outside the province of real genetics — because they fell outside reality in the first place.

During this period in my life, I made another discovery. I was no longer a racist. My anti-Semitism vanished as in a vagrant breeze. I had learned that there was no scientific basis for it. The sincere Nazi belief that the Jew was a creature outside of Nature, was so much rot. As for the cultural/mystical ideas that revolved around the Jew, the more I learned of how the Nazis perceived this, the more convinced I became that Hitler's party was composed of the insane. (An ironic note was that many European Jews were not even Semitic, but that is beside the point. The Nazis had little concern with, say, Arabs. It was the European Jew they were after, for whatever reasons were handy.)

Although I had come full circle on the question of racism, something else had happened to me in the interim. My hatred for one group of humanity had not van-

ished. My view of the common heritage of homo sapiens led me to despise all of the human race. The implications of this escaped me at the time, but it was the turning point of my life.

Even at the peak of their popularity, the world of genetics was only slightly influenced by Nazi thinking. Scientists are scientists first, ideologues second, if at all. To the extent that most scientists have a philosophy, it is a general sort of positive humanism: so it was with my teacher in genetics, a brilliant man — who happened to fit the Aryan stereotype coincidentally — and his collaborator, a Jew who was open about his family background, unlike me.

They were the first to discover the structure of DNA. No, they are not in the history books. By then Hitler had come to power. The Nazis destroyed many of their papers when they were judged enemies of the state — for political improprieties having nothing to do with the research. But I was never found guilty of harboring any traitorous notions. Long before the world ever heard of it, I continued this work with DNA. Publishing this information was the last thing I wanted to do. I had other ideas! By giving the Nazis gobbledygook to make their idiot policies sound good, I remained unmolested. There would be a place for me in the New Order.

Through the haze of Dietrich's memories, I could still think; could reflect on what I was assimilating directly from a pattern taken from another's mind. I was impressed that such a man existed, working in secret for decades on what had only recently riveted the world's attention. Only last year had a news story dealt with micro-biologists doing gene splicing. Yet he had done the same sort of experimentation decades earlier.

What had been a trickle suddenly turned into a torrent of concepts and formulae beyond my comprehension. I felt the strain. With quivering fingers I reached for the cylinder and . . .

The images stopped; the words stopped; the kaleidoscope exploding inside my head stopped; the pressure stopped . . .

"You have not finished the program Dr. Goebbels," said Dietrich. "It was at least another ten minutes before the 'reel

change.' " He was holding the other cylinder in his hand, tossing it lightly into the air and catching it as though it were of no importance.

"It's too much," I gasped, "to take all at once. Hold on, I've just remembered something: Thor, in the hallway . . . is it possible?" I thought back over what I had experienced. Dietrich had left simple eugenic breeding programs far behind. His search was for the chemical mysteries of life itself, like some sort of mad alchemist seeking the knowledge of a Frankenstein. "Did you —" I paused, hardly knowing how to phrase it. "Did you create Thor?"

He laughed. "Don't I wish!" he said, almost playfully. "Do you have any idea what you are talking about? To find the genetic formula for human beings would require a language I do not possess."

"A language?"

"You'd have to break the code, be able to read the hieroglyphic wonders of not just one, but millions of genes. It's all there, in the chromosomes, but I haven't been able to find it yet. No one has." He put his face near to mine, grinning, eyes wide and staring. "But I will be the first. Nobody can beat me to it, because only I can do it!"

For a moment I thought I was back in the presence of Hitler. This man was certainly a visionary. Moreover he was dangerous in a fashion beyond any politician.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"They finance me well. Look at these toys," he said, pointing at what he told me was an atmosphere chamber. "The work is expensive. Do you know how to invade the hidden territory of life itself? With radiation and poison to break down the structure and begin anew. To build! I can never live long enough, never receive enough sponsorship. It is the work of many life times. If only I had more subtle tools . . ."

Before I lost him to a scientist's reverie, I changed the subject: "My son's hair and eyes have changed."

"That's nothing but cosmetics," he said disdainfully.

"The SS wants you to do that?"

"It is considered a mark of distinction. My beautician there" — he pointed at the Japanese girl — "provides this minor and unimportant service."

Only a few blonde haired, blue eyed people were working in the laboratory. I asked why everyone had not undergone the treatment. The reason was because the few I had just seen were authentic members of that genotype. Dietrich was blunt: "We don't play SS games in here."

He showed me his workshop, treating the technicians as no more than expensive equipment. I wondered how Speer would react to all this. The place was even larger than I had first thought. I wondered what Heide would make of it all, cramped in her small cubbyhole at the university.

The seemingly endless walk activated my pains again. My host noticed this distress and suggested we sit down again. He had not misplaced the other cylinder. Somehow I was not surprised when he suggested that I sample its contents.

"Did I really share in your memories?" I asked him.

"A carefully edited production, but yes."

"Is there more of the same in this other one?"

"I hold in my hand images from a different point of view. I believe that you might find these even more interesting." He put the thing on my palm. "Do you want it?"

"I have a thousand unanswered questions."

"This will help."

Shrugging, I placed it to the same point on my forehead and ... *I did not know who I was.*

In vain I searched for the identity into which I had been plunged. What there was of me seemed to be a disembodied consciousness floating high above the European continent. It was like seeing in all directions at once. The moon above was very large, very near the earth — it was made of ice.

Horbiger's *Welteislehre*! It was a projection of one of his prophecies, when the moon would fall toward the earth, causing great upheavals in the crust — and working bizarre mutations on the life of the planet.

There was a panorama unfolding like the Worm Ouroboros: ancient epochs and the far future were melded together in an unbreakable circle. The world and the civilization I knew was nothing but a pass-

ing aberration in the history of the globe.

I saw ancient Atlantis, not the one spoken of by Plato, but from a time when men were not supposed to exist. The first Atlantis, inhabited by great giants who preceded man and taught the human race all its important knowledge: I beheld Prometheus as real.

Then I was shown that the pantheon of Nordic gods also had a basis in this revelation. Fabled Asgard was not a myth, but a legend — a vague memory of the giant cities that once thrived on earth.

Humanity was incredibly older than the best estimates of the scientists. More startling than that was the tapestry flickering in myriad colors to depict a far-away but inevitable future. All of the human race had perished but for a remnant of Aryans. And these last men, these idealized Viking types, were happily preparing for their own extermination — making way for the *Übermensch* who had nothing in common with them but for superficial appearances. The human race — as I knew it — was not really "human" at all. The Aryan was shown as that type closest to True Men, but when mutations caused by the descending moon brought back the giants, then the Aryan could join his fellows in welcome oblivion. The masters had returned. They would cherish this world, and perform the rites on the way to the next apocalypse, the *Ragnarok* when the cycle would start again — for the moon of ice would have at last smashed into the earth.

These images burned into my brain: gargantuan cities with spires threatening the stars; science utterly replaced by a functional magic that was the central power of these psycho-kinetic supermen who needed little else; everything vast, endless, bright ... so bright that it blinded my sight and my mind ...

With a scream I ripped the device from my perspiring skin. "This is madness!" I said, putting my head in my hands. "It can't be really true. The SS religion ... no!"

Dietrich put a comforting hand on my shoulder, much to my surprise. "Of course it is not true," he said. There must have been tears in my eyes. My expression was a mask of confusion. He went on: "What you have seen is no more true than one of

your motion pictures, or a typical release from the Ministry of Propaganda. It is more convincing, I'll admit. Just as the first cylinder allowed you to peer into the contents of one mind — my own — this other one has given you a composite picture of what a certain group believes; a collaborative effort, you could say."

"Religious fanatics of the SS," I muttered.

"They have a colorful prediction there, a hypothetical history, a faith. Of course it is not as worthwhile as my autobiography."

"What has one to do with the other?" I asked. "What does your story have to do with theirs?"

Dietrich stood, and put his hands behind his back. He was appearing to be more like Dr. Mabuse all the time. His voice sounded different somehow, like he was speaking to a very large audience: "They have hired me to perform a genetic task. In this laboratory a virus is being developed that will spare only blonde, blue-eyed men and women. Yes, Dr. Goebbels, the virus would kill you — with your dark hair and brown eyes — and myself, as readily as my Japanese assistant. It means your son would die also, because his current appearance is, after all, only cosmetic. It means most members of the Nazi party would perish as not being 'racially' fit by this standard.

"I am speaking of the most comprehensive genocide program of all time. A large portion of the populations in Sweden and Denmark and Iceland will survive. Too bad for the SS that virtually all those people think these ideas are purest folly, even evil. You know that much of the world's folk have rather strict ethical systems built into their quaint little cultures. That sort of thing gave the Nazis a difficult time at first, didn't it?"

I started to laugh. It was the sort of laughter that is not easy to control. I became hysterical. My concentration was directed at trying to stop the crazy sounds coming out of my mouth and I didn't notice anything else. Suddenly I was surprised to find myself on the floor. Arms were pulling me up and the professor was putting a hypodermic needle in my flesh. As the darkness claimed me, I wondered why



there were no accompanying pictures. Didn't this cylinder touching my arm have a story to tell?

It felt as if I had been asleep for days but I came to my wits a few minutes later, according to my watch at least. I was lying on a cot and he was standing over me. I knew who he really was: Dr. Mabuse.

"Goebbels, I thought you were made of sterner stuff," came his grim voice.

"You are a lunatic," I told him hoarsely.

"That's unfair. What in my conduct strikes you as unseemly?"

"You said you had been anti-Semitic. Then you told me that you had rejected racism. Now you are part of a plot that takes racism farther than anything I've ever heard of!"

"You've been out of touch."

"The whole mess is a shambles of contradictions!"

"You hurt me deeply," was his retort, but the voice sounded inhuman. "I expected more from a thoughtful Nazi. My sponsors want a project carried out for racist reasons. I do not believe in their theories, religion or pride. This pure blonde race they worship has never existed, in fact; it was simply a climatological adaptation in Northern Europe, never as widely dis-

tributed as Nazis think. It was a trait in a larger population group. I don't believe in SS myths. My involvement in the project is for other reasons."

"There cannot be any other reason."

"You forget what you have learned. Remember that I came to hate all of the human race. This does not mean that I gave up my reason or started engaging in wishful thinking. If the Burgundians enable me to wipe out most of humanity, with themselves exempt from the holocaust, I'll go along with it. The piper calls the tune."

"You couldn't carry on your work. You'd be dead!"

Sometimes one has the certainty of having been led down a primrose path, with the gate being locked against any hope of retreat, only *after* the graveyard sound of the latch snapping shut. Knowledge has a habit of coming too late. Such was the emotion that held me in an iron grip as soon as those words escaped my lips. Dr. Mabuse could never be a fool. It was impossible. Even as he spoke, I could anticipate the words: "Oh, I am sorry. I forgot to tell you that a few people outside the fortunate category may be saved. I can make them immune. In this sense, I'll be a Noah, collecting specimens for a specialist's ark. Anyone I consider worthy I will claim."

"Why do you hate the human race?" I asked him.

"To think that a Nazi has the gall to ask that question. Why do you hate the Jews?" he shot back. I could think of nothing to say. He continued: "There's little difference between us, morally. I know all about the genocide of World War Two, Goebbels. The difference between us is that I've set my sights higher. So what if Nazi Germany is annihilated? By what right can a Nazi criticize me?"

I remained insistent on one theme: "Why do it at all? You won't have destroyed all mankind. Burgundy will remain."

"Then Burgundy and I will play a game with each other," he said.

"What in God's name are you talking about?"

Another voice entered the conversation: "In Odin's name . . ." It was Kaufmann, walking over to join us. I was

pleased that he had a bandage on his head, and his face was drained of color. I wanted to strike him again! He made me think of Himmler at his worst.

It is my firm belief that the mind never ceases working, not even in the deepest slumber. While I had been unconscious the solution to the last part of the puzzle had presented itself. I didn't need to ask Mabuse about this part.

It is certainly understandable that expedient agreement is possible between two parties having nothing in common but one equally desired objective. There was the pact between Germany and Russia early in the war, for instance. The current case was different in one important respect: I doubted this particular alliance could last long enough to satisfy either party. I was certain that this was the Achilles' heel.

A comic opera kingdom with a mad scientist! If my daughter had known of this, why had she not told me more? Or had she only been guessing in the dark herself?

The knight in armor and the man in the laboratory: the two simply didn't mix! Since the founding of Burgundy, there had been an anti-science, anti-technology attitude at work. Even French critics who never had good things to say about the Reich managed to praise Burgundy for its lack of modern technique. (The French could never be made to shut up altogether, so we allowed them to talk about nearly everything except practical politics. The skeptics and cynics among them could always be counted on to come up with a rationale for their place in post-war Europe, stinging though it was to their pride. What else could they do?)

Here was a geneticist more advanced than anyone else in the field making common cause with a nation devoted to the destruction of science. That the Burgundians trusted his motives was peculiar; that he could trust theirs was even more bizarre.

The explanation that had come to me was this: unlike scientists who belonged to the humanist tradition and believed that genetic engineering could be made to improve the life of human beings (naive healers, but useful to a statesman such as my-

self), Dr. Mabuse wished to find the secret of manipulating the building blocks of life so that he could create something non-human. This creature he had in mind might very well be mistaken by a good Burgundian as one of the New Men or *Übermensch*, and viewed as an object of worship. Where others might oppose these new beings, the Burgundians — trained from birth in religious acceptance of superior beings in human form — would present no obstacle.

As for the Burgundians, leaders such as Kaufmann had to believe that wicked modern science had produced at least one genius who was the vehicle of higher mysteries: a puppet of Destiny.

I looked in the faces of these two men, such different faces, such different minds. There was something familiar there — a fervor, a wild devotion to The Cause, and a lust to practice sacrificial rites. As Minister of Propaganda, it had been the look I had sought to inculcate in the population with regard to the Jews.

It was evident that I had not been made privy to their machinations carelessly. Either I would be allowed to join them or I would die. As for the possibility of the former, I did not consider it likely. Perhaps the forebodings engendered in me by Hilda were partly to blame, but in fact I knew that I could not be part of such a scheme against the Fatherland. Could I convince them that I would be loyal? No, I didn't believe it. Could I have convinced them if I had inured myself against shock and displayed nought but enthusiasm for their enterprise? I doubted it.

The question remained why I had been chosen for the privilege. The message Hilda had shown me was rife with unpleasant implications. I took a gamble by sitting up, pointing at Mabuse, and shouting to Kaufmann: "This man is a Jew!"

I could tell that that was a mistake by the exchange of expressions between the two. Of course they had to know. No one could keep a secret in the SS's own country. If they overlooked Dr. Mabuse's ideas and profession, they could overlook anything. This was one occasion when traditional

Jew-baiting would not help a Nazi! I didn't like the situation. I didn't want to be on the receiving end.

The voice of Mabuse seemingly spoke to me, but the words appeared to be for Kaufmann's benefit: "It is too bad that you will not be able to work with the new entertainment technology. I was hoping we could transfer your memories of the affair with Lida Barova. As she was your most famous scandal, it would have made for a good show."

Before I could answer this taunt, Kaufmann's gruff voice announced: "Your son is waiting."

"He should wait for me, not the other way around!"

Kaufmann was oblivious: "He is with his fellows. Come." Mabuse helped me get off the cot and then we were marching down the corridor again. I was dizzy on my feet, my hand hurt, and my head felt as though it were stuffed full of cotton. So many random thoughts swirling in my mind, easily displaced by immediate concern for my future welfare . . .

Twilight was fast approaching as we entered the courtyard I had noticed earlier in Kaufmann's office. The large funeral pyre was still there, unused. Except that now there was a bier next to it. We were too far away to see whose body was on it, but with every step we drew nearer.

A door beside the pyre opened and a line of young men emerged, dressed in black SS regalia. In the lead was my son. They proceeded remorselessly in our direction. Helmuth gave Kaufmann the Nazi salute. He answered with the same. I didn't feel like doing it.

"Father," said Helmuth, gravely, "I have been granted the privilege of overseeing this observance. Please approach the body."

Such was the formality of his tone that I hesitated to intercede with a fatherly appeal. The expression on his face was blank to my humanity. I did as requested.

Not for a moment did I suspect the identity of the body. Yet as I gazed at that familiar, waxen face, I knew that it fit the Burgundian pattern. It had to be his body. Once more I stood before Adolf Hitler.

"It was an outrage," said Kaufmann, "to

preserve his body as though he were Lenin. His soul belongs in Valhalla. We intend to send it there today." My mouth was open with a question that would not be voiced as I turned to Kaufmann. He bowed solemnly. "Yes, Herr Goebbels. You were one of his most loyal deputies. You will accompany him."

There are times when no amount of resolve to be honorable and brave will suffice; I made to run, but many strong hands were on me in an instant. Helmuth placed his hand on my shoulder. "Don't make it worse," he whispered. "It has to be. Preserve your dignity. I want to be proud of you."

There was nothing to say. Nothing to do but contemplate a horrible death. I struggled in vain, doing my best to ignore the existence of Helmuth. It was no surprise that he had been selected for this honor. It made perfect sense in the demented scheme of things.

They brought out an aluminum ramp. Two husky SS men began to carry Hitler's body up the incline, while Helmuth remained behind, no doubt with the intention of escorting me up that unwelcome path.

"The manner of your death will remain a state secret of Burgundy," said Kaufmann. "We were able to receive good publicity from your Ministry when we executed those two French snoopers for trespassing: Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier. This is different." He paused, then added: "Soon publicity won't matter anymore!"

My options were being reduced to nothing. Even facing death, I could not entirely surrender. The years I had spent perfecting the art of propaganda had taught me that no situation is so hopeless that nothing may be salvaged from it. I reviewed the facts: despite their temporary agreement, Kaufmann and the new Mabuse were really working at cross purposes. If I could only exploit those differences I could sow dissension in their ranks. Mabuse held the trump card, so I decided to direct the play at Kaufmann.

"I suppose I'm free to talk," I said to Kaufmann's back as he watched the red ball of the sun setting beyond the castle walls. The sky was streaked with orange

and gold — the thin strands of cumulus clouds that seemed so reassuringly distant. There were a million other places I could have been at that moment, but for a vile twist of fate. There had to be some way of escape!

No one answered my query and I continued: "You're not a geneticist, are you Kaufmann? How would you know if you can trust Dietrich?" He was Dietrich to them, but to me he would always be Mabuse. "What if he is lying? What if his process can't be made specific enough to exclude any group from the virus?"

Mabuse laughed. Kaufmann answered without turning around: "For insurance's sake, he will immunize everyone in Burgundy as well as his assistants. If something goes wrong, it will be a shame to lose all those excellent Aryan specimens elsewhere in the world."

"Nothing will go wrong," said Mabuse.

I wouldn't give up that easily and struck back with: "How do you know he won't inject you with poison when the time comes? It would be like a repetition of the Black Plague that ravaged Burgundy in 1348."

"I applaud your inventive suggestion," said Mabuse.

"We have faith," was Kaufmann's astounding reply.

"A faith I will reward," boomed out Mabuse's monster voice. "They are not stupid, Goebbels. Some true believers have sufficient medical training to detect an attempt at the stunt you suggest."

In desperation, I spoke again to my son: "Do you trust this?"

"I am here," came his answer in a low voice. "I have taken the oath."

"It's no good," taunted Mabuse. "Stop trying to save yourself."

They had Hitler's body at the top of the ramp. The SS men stood at attention. Everyone was waiting. The setting sun seemed to me at that moment to be pausing in its descent, waiting.

"Father," said Helmuth, "Germany has become decadent. It has forgotten its ideals. That my sister Hilda is allowed to live is proof enough. Look at you. You're not the man you were in the grand old days of the genocide."

"Son," I said, my voice trembling, "what

is happening in Burgundy is not the same thing."

"Oh yes it is," said Dr. Mabuse.

Kaufmann strolled over to where I was standing and craned his neck to look at the top of the ramp with the worldly remains of Adolf Hitler. He said, "Nazis were good killers during the war. Jews, Gypsies, and many others fell by the sword, even when it exacted a heavy price from other elements of the war program. Speer always wanting his slave labor for industrial requirements. Accountants always counting pennies. The mass murder was for its own sake, a promise of better things to come!

"After the war, only Burgundy seemed to care any longer. Rulings that came out of New Berlin were despicable, loosening up the censorship laws and not strictly enforcing the racial standards. Do you know that a taint of Jewishness is considered to be sexually arousing in Germany's more decadent cabarets of today? Even the euthanasia policy for old and unfit citizens was never more than words on paper. The Nazi party was corrupted from within. It let the dream die."

The kind of hatred motivating this Burgundian leader was no stranger to me. Never in my worst nightmares did it occur to me that I could be a victim of this kind of thinking.

Kaufmann gestured to the men on the ramp and they placed Hitler's body on top of the pyre. "It is time," mourned Helmuth's voice in my ear. Other young SS men surrounded me, Helmuth holding my arm. We began to walk.

Other SS men had appeared around the dry pyramid of kindling wood and straw. They were holding burning torches. Kaufmann gestured and they set the pyre aflame. The crackling and popping sounds plucked at my nerves as whitish smoke slowly rose. It would take a few minutes before the flame reached the apex to consume Hitler's body . . . and whatever else was near. My only consolation was that they had not used lighter fluid — dreadful modern stuff — to hasten the inferno.

Somewhere in that blazing doom Odin and Thor and Freyja were waiting. I was in no hurry to greet them.

I wondered at how the SA must have felt

when the SS burst in on them, machine guns ripping out their lives in bloody ruins. Perhaps I should have thought of Magda, but I did not. Instead all my whimsies were directed to miracles and last minute salvations. How I had preached hope in the final hours of the war before our luck had turned. I had fed Hitler on stories of Frederick the Great's diplomatic coup in the face of a military debacle. I had compared the atom bomb — when we got it — to the remarkable change in fortunes in the House of Brandenburg. Now I found myself pleading with the cruel fates for a personal victory of the same sort.

I was at the top of the ramp. Helmuth's hands were set firmly against my back. To him had fallen the task of consigning his father's living body to the flames. They must have considered him an adept pupil to be trusted with so severe a task.

So completely absorbed was I in thoughts of a sudden reprieve that I barely noticed the distant explosion. Someone behind me said, "What was that?" I heard Kaufmann calling from the ground but his words were lost in a louder explosion that occurred nearby.

A manic voice called out: "We must finish the rite!" It was Helmuth. He pushed me into empty space. I fell on Hitler's corpse, and grabbed at the torso to keep from falling into an opening beneath in which raged the impersonal executioner.

"Too soon," one of my son's comrades was saying. "The fire isn't high enough. You'll have to shoot him or . . ."

Already I was rolling onto the other side of Hitler's body as I heard a gunshot. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Helmuth clutching his stomach as he fell into the red flames.

Shouts. Gunfire. More explosions. An army was climbing over the wall of the courtyard. A helicopter was zooming in overhead. My first thought was that it must be the German army come to save me. I was too delighted to care how that was possible.

The conflagration below was growing hotly near. Smoke filling my eyes and lungs was about to choke me to death. I was contemplating a jump from the top — a risky proposition at best — when I was given a

better chance by a break in the billowing fumes. The men had cleared the ramp for being ill protected against artillery.

Once again I threw myself over Hitler's body and hit the metal ramp with a thud. What kept me from falling off was the body of a dead SS man, whose leg I was able to grasp as I started to bounce back. Then I lifted myself and ran as swiftly as I could, tripping a quarter of the way from the ground and rolling bruisedly the rest of the way. The whizzing bullets missed me. I lay hugging the dirt, for fear of being shot if I rose.

Even from that limited position I could evaluate certain aspects of the encounter. The Burgundians had temporarily given up their penchant for fighting with swords and were making do with machine guns instead (the one exception was Thor who ran forward in a berserker rage, wielding an axe — The bullets tore him to ribbons). The battle seemed to be going badly for them.

Then I heard the greatest explosion of my life. It was as if the castle had been converted into one of von Braun's rockets as a sheet of flame erupted from underneath it and the whole building quaked with the vibrations. The laboratory must have been destroyed instantly.

"It's Goebbels," a voice sang out. "Is he alive?"

"If he is, we'll soon remedy that."

"No," said the first voice. "Let's find out."

Rough hands turned me over . . . and I expected to look once more into faces of SS men. These were young men, all right, but there was something disturbingly familiar about them. I realized that they might be Jews! The thought, even then, that my life had been saved by Jews was too much to bear. But those faces, like the faces that I've thought about too many times to count.

"Blindfold him," one said. It was done, and I was being pushed through the courtyard blind, the noises of battle echoing all around. Once we stopped and crouched behind something. There was an exchange of shots. Then we were running and I was pulled into a conveyance of some sort. The whirring sound identified it in-

stantly as a helicopter revving up; and we were off the ground, and we were flying away from that damned castle. A thin, high whistling sound went by — someone must have still been firing at us. And then the fight faded away in the distance.

AN HOUR later we had landed. I was still blindfolded. Low voices were speaking in German. Suddenly I heard a scrap of Russian. This in turn was followed by a comment in Yiddish; and there was a sentence in what I took to be Hebrew. The different conversations were interrupted by a deep voice speaking in French announcing the arrival of an important person. After a few more whisperings — in German again — my blindfold was removed.

Standing in front of me was Hilda, dressed in battle fatigues. "Tell me what has happened," I said, adding as an afterthought — "if you will."

"Father, you have been rescued from Burgundy by a military operation of combined forces."

"You were only incidental," added a lean, dark haired man by her side.

"Allow me to introduce this officer," she said, putting her hand on his arm. We won't use names, but this man is with the Israeli Liberation Army. My involvement was sponsored by the guerilla arm of the German Freedom League. Since your abduction the rest of the organization has gone underground. We are also receiving an influx of Russians into our ranks."

If everything else that had happened seemed improbable, this was enough to convince me that I had finally lost my sanity and was enmeshed in the impossible. "There is no Israeli Liberation Army," I said, "because there is no state of Israel."

"No state," she agreed, "but an army just the same."

The thin so-called officer said, "Your daughter's personal loyalty prevents her from accepting the evidence we have gathered about your knowledge of the 'Final Solution.'"

My dear, sweet daughter. Reaching out to embrace her I encountered an unexpected rebuff. She slapped me! Her words were acid as she said, "Fealty only goes so far! Whatever your part was in the geno-

cide, the rest of your career is an open book. You are an evil man. I can't lie to myself about it any longer."

There was no room for anger. No room left for anything but a hunger for security. I was ready to happily consign my entire family to Hitler's funeral pyre if by so doing I could return home to New Berlin. The demeanor of these free-lance soldiers told me that they had reached a decision concerning me some time ago.

Hilda must have read my thoughts. "They are going to let you go, this time, as a favor to me. We agreed in advance that Burgundy was the priority. Everything else had to take a back seat, including waking up about my parents."

"When may I leave?"

"We're near the Burgundian border. My friends will disappear, until a later date when you may see them again. As for me, I'm leaving Europe for good."

"Where will you go?" I didn't expect an answer.

"To the American Republic. They have accepted me for citizenship. My radical credentials are an asset over there."

"America," I said listlessly. "Why?"

"Just make believe you are concocting another of your ideological speeches. Do this one about individual rights and you'll have an answer. Goodbye, Father."

I was blindfolded again. Despite mixed feelings, I was grateful that my daughter had interceded to save my life, from both the Burgundians and her unsuspected friends.

They released me at the great oak tree I had observed when flying into Burgundy. As I removed the blindfold, I heard the helicopter take off behind me. My eyes focused on the plaque nailed to the tree that showed how SS men had ripped up railway and transplanted this tremendous oak to block that sign of the modern world. It had taken a lot of manpower.

I thought of how easily manpower can be reduced to dead flesh. By a bullet. Or a virus. Or gas.

I turned around. The flowing green hills of a world I had never fully understood stretched out to the horizon. With a shudder, I looked away, walked around the tree and began following the rusty track on the

other side. It would lead me to the old station where I would put in a call to home.

January 1970

The doctors tell me that I haven't long to live. A combination of maladies afflicts me. They say I should get more sleep, also. Fool doctors. Of course I should sleep. How I would give anything for a peaceful night's sleep.

After I returned from Burgundy four years ago, I made my way to Hitler's crypt. Sure enough the body was gone. A duplicate had been substituted. They were blaming it on unidentified terrorists. On no account was the public to find out. I was debriefed in New Berlin by the Gestapo, of all people. The worst part of it was that most of my story was not believed.

Petty bureaucrats without imagination! To doubt my word! If it had not been for leaders of my caliber there wouldn't even be the Europe of today in which these little men earn their little living. Men of imagination built this society. A few men of imagination in Burgundy almost changed everything again. A few decide.

The one part of my story they believe was the attack by Jewish commandoes. This is because Burgundy filed an official complaint and called on the treaty between our countries for protection.

The monumental temerity! I insisted that Kaufmann and Mabuse be arrested. "Mabuse?" asked the bureaucrat incredulously.

"I mean Dietrich!" I corrected myself. I couldn't stand the snicker on that administrator's face. Did he think I'd taken leave of my senses?

"We have no Dietrich listed."

"Well, Kaufmann then. You surely admit to his existence."

"He is reported dead in the raid," came the bland answer.

"Was his body found?"

"He was reported dead," the man repeated. Not just a bureaucrat, but a German bureaucrat! If it's written down officially, he'll believe anything.

Not one person in authority accepts that I was kidnapped, much less nearly murdered. When I demanded that Himmler be hauled out of his wheelchair and

arrested, I was quietly informed that he had died in his sleep during my absence. Was there to be no satisfaction for me?

To make matters worse the harassment began. There was talk of putting me under psychiatric treatment. One sympathetic quack suggested that I had been brainwashed by Jews. The paranoid idiot! Even my friends in the Propaganda Ministry stopped talking to me. Every day, in every way, matters deteriorated.

Magda has left me after all those useless years of worrying about our public image. She said she couldn't stand my constant suspicions, the endless nightmares. It wasn't my fault that I kept waking up in a cold sweat, screaming. She was a faithless woman.

My daughters Heide, Helga and Holly avoid me. They don't want to be left out of the fun, I suppose.

The Nazi party has officially censured me for my wild stories. The damned party! After all I've done for them. What has happened to my rights?

The New Berlin Post reports that America has made recent advances in genetic research that could revolutionize medicine. Is it only coincidence that this has happened since my daughter's emigration there? That group of hers had time to take something out of Mabuse's laboratory before they blew it up.

The rhetoric is uniformly American. They speak of the need for strict, ethical guidelines to make certain that these developments will be used to eliminate disease. The talk is of the defeat of cancer, for one example, rather than the beginning of a new race of giants. When I tried to contact German scientists to discuss the matter, every overture was rebuked. The government is obviously behind this, also.

Thank God for the drugs. They help somewhat. At least I get enough sleep to stay alive. I remember the stories of Goering's drug addiction, all the idle gossip. I hate the fickle public.

My worst dream is the one in which Mabuse goes to work for the Jews. Somehow his genetic research has leaped ahead of the rest of the world by centuries. He is making giant clay monsters to send against the Fatherland: an army of

Golems. When I attempt to flee, my path of retreat is blocked by the Teutonic Knights.

Hilda has written a book in America. It is being acclaimed as the most profound anti-Nazi work yet published (but for one fringe group over there that believes she is a Nazi spy). I cannot bear to look at it, although periodically copies are mailed to me. Ah, for the days of book burning again.

On the advice of one of the doctors I briefly took up painting to relax my shattered nerves. I gave it up after an attempt at a calm pastoral scene ended with a depiction of Jewish commandoes accusing me of terrible crimes; they held dozens of skulls taken from the death camps.

What has happened to my plans for Europe? Where is the world I envisioned? There is only a barren landscape of broken buildings and empty mausoleums. It is dark. So very dark. The only light comes from the tower window of a small castle, black against the midnight sea.

PAUL JOSEPH GOEBBELS
BORN OCTOBER 29, 1897
DIED MARCH 15, 1970

Why I Wrote This Story

I did "Moon of Ice" for many reasons: to develop an alternate history, use genetic engineering in the plot, have Mabuse as a villain, examine the psychology of evil through the first person narration of Goebbels, and to write science fiction! But the real pay off was in dark irony for the propaganda expert of the Third Reich.

What could be worse for a Nazi than to be out-Nazied, to be beaten at his own game? Instead of the grand, Wagnerian gesture, in the bunker, dying in his own eyes as a hero, Goebbels deserved worse, as did his master. The tragic victims of his final bloody symbol were his own children, whom he murdered.

Whenever someone opts for evil, he is gambling that he'll stay on top. The last

thing he expects is to be on the receiving end.

All too often real life does not imitate art where poetic justice is concerned. In certain kinds of science fiction and fantasy, what ought to be true wins out against impossible odds. If necessary, the cosmic axis shifts, and one way or another justice is done.

Regarding the “what if” plot-line, “Moon of Ice” is by no means the first fiction to posit a world in which Hitler won. My hope is that I have researched the topic well enough — and told a narrative new enough — to justify another addition to the canon. (I should also note that I probably

wouldn’t have undertaken this project had I not been inspired years ago by Norman Spinrad’s brilliant satire, *The Iron Dream*. In his alternate history, however, Hitler became a science fiction writer in America instead of the dictator of Germany.)

Other tales about the world of “Moon of Ice” would be possible. What kind of societies would result in the course of a thousand year Reich? And would they be German or Burgundian?

—Brad Linaweaver

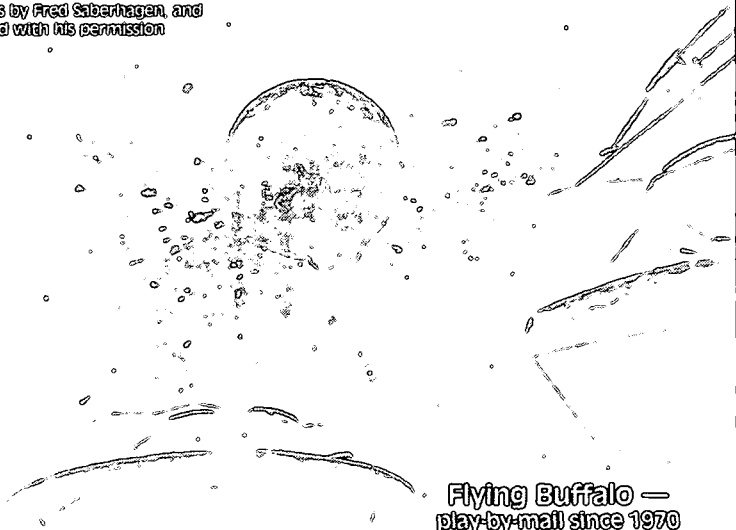
A Mist in The Chamber

There is something right here
that does not want itself known—
without familiar form,
it is a shadow of some gigantic orchestra
assembled by a terrible authority
to perform against its will.
In a bitter now
it is commanded to harmonize
moving and changing with no beginning or end
craving to see the vaguaries of itself expressed on paper
It is a soothing
attractive
melody
that will pull you in to unfamiliar dreams
and laugh you into the ground.

—Edward Martindale

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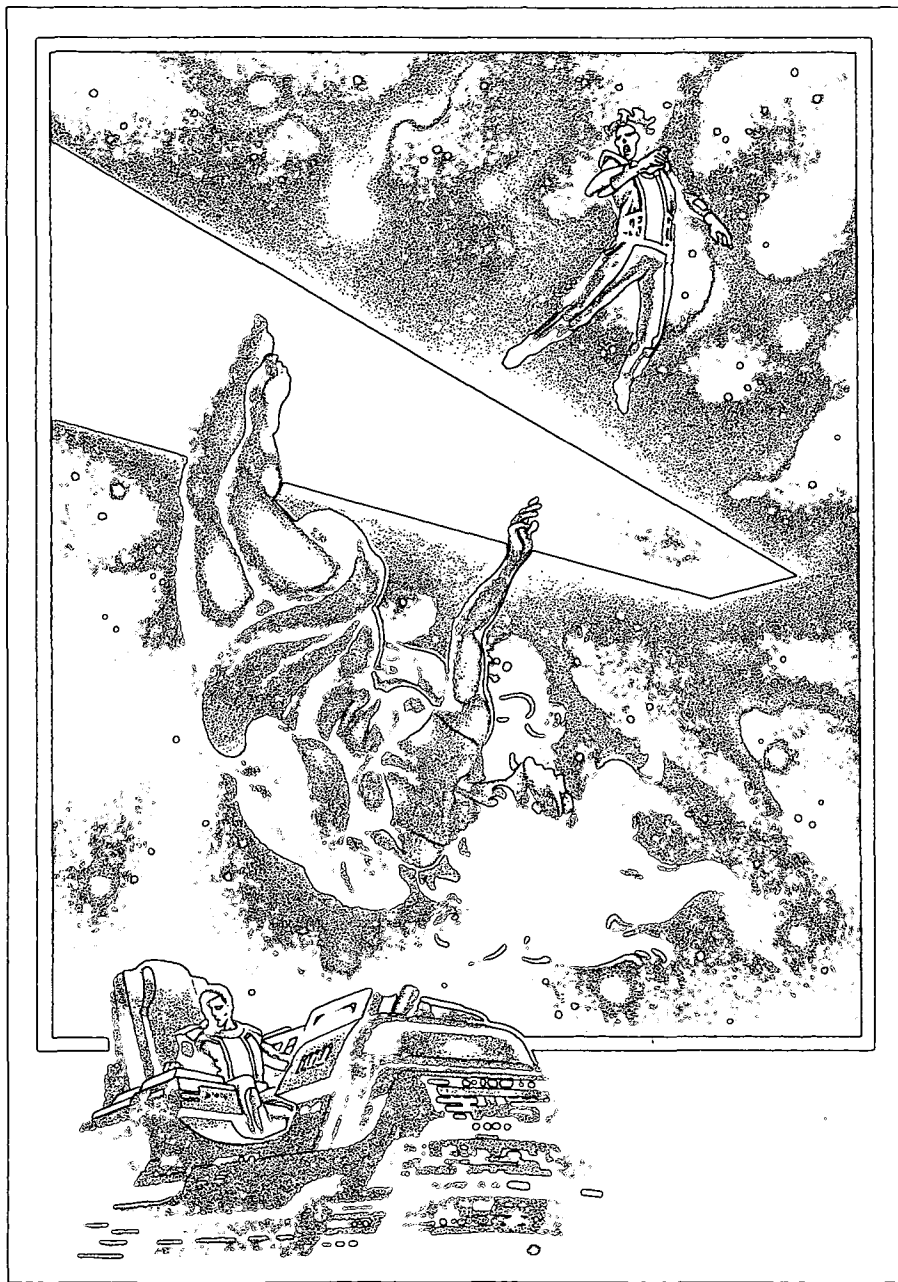
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A. E. van Vogt

SHIP OF DARKNESS

INTRODUCTION

If I have ever written a "spiritual" fantasy, "Ship of Darkness" is it.

At the time of its origin, I had got to thinking about the growing number of people who meditate in terms of certain philosophies, seeking, in one instance, Nirvana — which correlates with a kind of ecstatic nothingness (at least, that was my analysis of it when I was considering the meaning of the state of being as it had been described to me).

So the story set out, so to speak, on the wings of science: a spaceship. (A form of reality, which is where everyone begins: reality, that is.) The protagonist, who is the sole person aboard the spaceship, is relying on the advice of a man named Hollay, who is obviously safely back on Earth. Hollay is only mentioned twice, but from the reference we are entitled to identify him as that stereotype of science fiction in film and TV, as a wise professor who ob-

viously knows things that the rest of us have never heard of before. Such a person is the authority figure to whom writers of speculative fiction refer so that the madness of the story being concocted will thereby acquire a scientific certification.

According to Hollay, the flow of time can be easily transformed, or transcended, in the emptiness of interstellar space. Something about the stress on the space-time continuum being severe only near matter, is the implication. (If you have seen Richard Matheson's delightful motion picture, *Somewhere in Time*, you will recall that a similar type of knowledgeable professor recommended hypnotic suggestion as a proven method of ensuring time travel.)

In my story, I was intent on dramatizing the pathway to Nirvana; and then, of course, there had to be a surprise ending that would, somehow, provide the final

concealment for my attempted dramatization of an Eastern philosophical idea.

Why conceal it? Well, first of all, I didn't wish to offend even a single true believer. And it was not really possible to know in advance how the truly sincere acolyte would react.

However, on re-reading the story for this reprint, I had the feeling that the

dramatization, and the concept of meaning and communication that transcends thinking, constitutes virtually a first attempt ever to depict Nirvana.

Rather beautifully.

—A.E. van Vogt

"The butterfly people swooped upon the male, bending and bucking above his falling figure, gorgeous wings scintillating with the colors of the rainbow, a hideous commingling of beauty and horror." (See Magnanthropus)

IT WAS DIFFERENT, D'Ormand realized, deciding on earth to do something. And actually doing it in intergalactic space. For six months, he had headed out from the solar system, away from the gigantic spiralled wheel that was the main galaxy. And now the moment had come to take his plunge into time.

A little shakily D'Ormand set the dials of the time machine for 3,000,000 A.D. And then, his hand on the activator, he hesitated. According to Hollay, the rigid laws that controlled the time flow on planets would be lax and easy to escape from, here in this sunless darkness. First of all, Hollay had said, accelerate the ship to maximum velocity, and so put the ultimate possible strain on the fabric of space. Then act.

Now! D'Ormand thought, sweating. And pushed the plunger hard. There was a sickening jar, a steely screeching of wrenched metal. And then again the steady feel of flight.

D'Ormand's vision was swimming. But he was aware, as he shook the dizziness out of his head, that he would be able to see again in a moment. He smiled with the grim tenseness of a man who has risked his life successfully.

Sight came abruptly. Anxious, D'Ormand bent towards the time machine control board. And then drew back, shocked.

It wasn't there.

He looked around, incredulous. But his was no big ship, requiring detailed scrutiny. It was one room with an engine, a bunk, fuel tanks and a galley. Nothing could be hidden in it. *The time machine wasn't there.*

That was the metal tearing sound he had heard, the machine wrenching itself off into time, leaving the ship behind. He had failed. He was still groaning inwardly when a movement caught the corner of his eye. He turned with a painful jerk of his body. High in the viewing plate he saw the dark ship.

ONE LOOK; and D'Ormand knew that, whatever the reason for the time machine's departure, it had not failed.

The ship was close to him. So close that at first he thought it was the nearness which made it visible. And then, the eerie reality of its lightless state penetrated. He stared, and the first fascination roared into his mind, the first realization that this must be a craft of the year 3,000,000 A.D.

Fascination faded before a thrill of doubt that gathered into a blank dismay. Abruptly, it wasn't only the fact that he could see it that was unnatural. There was the ship itself.

Out of some nightmare that ship might have sailed. At least two miles long, half a mile wide, a foot thick, it was a craft fit only for such a darksome sea as space itself. It was a platform floating in the night of interstellar emptiness.

And on that broad deck, men and women stood. Naked they were, and nothing at all, no barrier however flimsy, protected their bodies from the cold of space. They couldn't be breathing in that airless void. Yet they lived.

They lived, and they stood on that broad dark deck. And they looked up at him, and beckoned. And called. The strangest call it was that had ever come to a mortal man. It was not a thought, but something deeper, stronger, more moving. It was like a sudden body-realization of thirst or hunger. It grew like a craving for drugs.

He must land his spaceship on the platform. He must come down and be one of them. He must . . . primitive, unrestrained, terrible desire . . .

With a rush, the spaceship glided to a landing. Immediately, with the same terrible urge, his desire was for sleep.

D'Ormand had time for one desperate thought of his own. Got to fight, came that flash of inner warning. Got to leave, leave. At once. Sleep came in the middle of horrendous fear.

SILENCE! HE was lying with eyes closed in a world that was as still as —

D'Ormand couldn't find a mental comparison. There wasn't any. There wasn't anything in his entire existence that could match the intense stillness, the utter absence of sound that pressed against him like — Once again there was no comparison. There wasn't any pressure. There was only the silence.

Strange, he thought: and the first remote impulse came to open his eyes. The impulse faded; and there remained in his mind the measured conviction that surely he, who had spent so many months alone in a spaceboat, must know the full meaning of silence.

Except that in the past there had been the faint *sshhh ssshhh* of the inhalation and exhalation of his breathing, the occasional sucking sound of his lips on a tube of nourishing soup, and the movements of his body. This was — what?

His brain wouldn't make a definition. D'Ormand opened his eyes. At first, sight offered the barest variation of impression. He was lying partly on his side, partly on his back. Nearby, blotting out the stars, was a torpedo-shaped blob about thirty feet long and twelve feet high. Aside from that there wasn't anything in his line of vision but stars and the darkness of space.

Normal enough. He had no fear. His

mind and its life seemed far away. Memory was an even remoter adjunct. But after a moment there trickled to the surface of his will the desire to place his physical position relative to his surroundings.

There had been, he remembered weightily, a dark ship. Then sleep. Now stars and interstellar night. He must still be sitting in the control chair gazing at the viewing plate and the vista of heavens it revealed.

But — D'Ormand frowned mentally — he wasn't sigging. He was lying on his back, staring up, up . . . at a skyfull of stars and at a blob of something that looked like another spaceboat.

With an owl-like detachment, his brain argued against that impression. Because his was the only earth spaceship in that part of the universe. There couldn't be a second ship. Just like that D'Ormand was on his feet. He had no consciousness of getting up. One instant he was sprawling on his back. Now he was standing, swaying . . .

HE WAS standing on a broad deck beside his spaceboat. The deck, everything, was plainly visible in a dim fashion for its entire length and width. And all around him, near and far, were naked men and women standing, sitting, lying down, paying him not the slightest heed.

He was clawing — clawing with senseless fingers at the air lock of the spaceboat, striving to tear it open by strength alone.

After a mindless period of time, his spaceman's training began to dictate those automatic, desperate movements of his body. He grew aware that he was studying the lock mechanism anxiously, tugging at it gingerly, testingly. Then he was stepping back, surveying the small ship as a whole.

Out of some unplumbed reserve of calm there came to D'Ormand at last the will and the ability to walk quietly around the spaceboat and peer in at the portholes. The inside was a dim well of familiar mechanisms and metal shapes, the sight of which brought a spasm of returning frenzy, easier to fight this time.

He stood finally very still, holding his mind clear of extraneous ideas, thinking

one simple, straightforward thought, a thought so big that all his brain was needed to hold it, to balance it, and comprehend the immense reality of it.

And it grew harder, not easier, to grasp that he was on the platform ship. His brain started to twist, to dart off in streaks of doubt and fear and disbelief. But always it came back. It had to. There was no sane elsewhere for it to go. And there was nothing, utterly nothing to do but wait here until his captors showed by action what further fate they intended for him.

He sat down. And waited.

AN HOUR at least went by, an hour like no other in the history of his world; a man from 2975 A.D. watching a scene on a space liner of thirty thousand centuries later.

The only thing was, and it took the whole hour for the fact to sink in, there wasn't anything to watch except the incredible basic scene itself. Nobody did anything. Nobody seemed to be remotely aware that he was on the ship. Occasionally in the dimness a man strolled by, a figure that moved against the low-hung stars, plainly visible as was the whole dark deck and its cargo of superhuman beings.

But no one came to satisfy his growing lust, his need for information. With a tingling shock the realization came finally to D'Ormand that he must make the approach himself, force the issue by personal action.

Abruptly, he felt astounded that he had half-lain, half sat there while the precious minutes flowed by. He must have been completely dazed, and no wonder.

But that was over. In a burst of determination, he leaped to his feet. And then, shaking, he hesitated. Was he actually intending to approach one of the crew of this ship of night, and ask questions by thought transference?

It was the alien-ness that scared him. These people weren't human. After three million years, their relation to him had no more meaning than that of the ape of his own day that shared his ancestry.

THREE MILLION years, 16×10^{10} minutes; and every few seconds of that incon-

ceivable span of time, somebody has been born, somebody else had died, life had gone on in its tremendous, terrifying fashion until here, after unthinkable eons, was the ultimate man. Here was evolution carried to such limits that space itself had been conquered by some unguessable and stupendous development of biological adaption — stupendous but so simple, that in a single sleep period he, a stranger, had been miraculously transformed into the same state.

D'Ormand's thought paused there. He felt a sudden uneasiness, a sharp disturbing consciousness that he couldn't possibly have the faintest idea how long he had been asleep. It could have been years, or centuries. Time did not exist for a man who slept.

It seemed abruptly more important than ever to discover what all this was about. His gaze came to rest on a man a hundred feet away, walking slowly.

He reached the moving figure; and then, at the last instant, he shrank back in dismay. Too late. His hand, thrusting forth, had touched the naked flesh.

The man turned, and looked at D'Ormand. With a contorted gesture, D'Ormand let go of that unresisting arm. He cringed from eyes that blazed at him like points of flame stabbing through slitted holes.

Curiously, it wasn't the demoniac quality of the gaze itself that sent waves of fear surging along D'Ormand's nerves. It was the soul that peered from those burning eyes — a strange, alien spirit that stared at him with an incomprehensible intensity.

Then the man turned, and walked on.

D'Ormand was trembling. But after a moment he knew that he couldn't hold back. He didn't let himself think about it, just walked forward and fell into step beside the tall, enigmatic stroller. They walked on, past groups of men and women. And now that he was moving among them, D'Ormand noticed a fact that had previously escaped him. The women outnumbered the men three to one. At least.

The wonder about that passed. He and his companion strolled on in that strangest of promenades. They skirted the edge of the ship. Forcing himself to be casual,

D'Ormand stepped to one side, and stared down into an abyss that stretched a billion light years deep.

HE BEGAN to feel better. He ransacked his mind for some method of bridging the mental gulf between himself and the dark stranger. He thought; It must have been telepathy they had used to compel him to land his spaceship. If he concentrated around an idea now, he might receive an answer.

The train of thought ended because at that point he noticed, not for the first time, that he was still clothed. But suddenly he thought of it from the angle: *they* had left him dressed. What was the psychology?

He walked on, his mind blank, head bent, watching his trousered legs and, beside him, the naked legs of the thin man pumping along steadily.

JUST WHEN the first impression began to steal into him, D'Ormand was only vaguely aware, so gradually they came. There was a thought about the hour of battle drawing near; and that he must prove himself worthy before then, and so live forever on the the ship. Otherwise, he would suffer the exile.

It was like a quantum. One instant he was only dimly conscious of that alien blur of ideas. The next his mind made a frantic jump to the new comprehension of his position.

The effect of the warning grew stronger. In abrupt shock of fear, D'Ormand headed for his spaceboat. He was tugging at the impassive entrance before the realization penetrated with finality that it offered no means of escape. Exhausted, he sank down on the deck. He became amazed at the extent of his fright. But there was no doubt of the cause. He had received information and a warning. A gelid, a bleak and steel-like warning: He must adjust to the ways of this ship before some fantastic battle was joined and, having proved worthy, live here forever.

... Forever! It was that part of the idea that had for solid minutes staggered the fulcrums of his reason. The mood yielded to the dark drift of minutes. It seemed suddenly impossible that he had understood

correctly the tiny tide of ideas that had been directed at him. A battle coming up. That was senseless. Be worthy, or suffer exile! Suffer what? D'Ormand wracked his brain, but the meaning came again: Exile! It could mean death, he decided finally with a cold logic.

He lay, his face twisted into a black frown. He felt violently angry at himself. What a stupid fool he had been, losing his nerve in the middle of a successful interview.

It *had* been successful. Information had been asked for, and given. He should have held his ground, and kept his mind clenched, concentrated on a hundred different questions in turn: Who were they? Where was the ship going? What was the drive mechanism of the great platform liner? Why were there three women to one man?

The thought trailed. In his intensity, he had jerked into a partial sitting position — and there not more than five feet away was a woman.

D'ORMAND SANK slowly back to the deck. He saw that the woman's eyes were glowing at him unwinkingly. After a minute, uneasy, D'Ormand turned over on his back. He lay tense, staring up at the bright circle of the galaxy he had left, so long ago now. The points of light that made up the glorious shining swirl seemed farther away than they had ever been.

The life he had known, of long swift trips to far planets, of pleasurable weeks spent in remote parts of space, was unreal now. And even farther away in spirit than it was in time and space.

With an effort, D'Ormand roused himself. This was no time for nostalgia. He had to get it into his head that he faced a crisis. The woman hadn't come merely to look at him. Issues were being forced, and he must meet them. With abrupt will, he rolled over and faced the woman again. For the first time, he appraised her.

She was rather pleasing to look at. Her face was youthful, shapely. Her hair was dark. It needed combing, but it wasn't very thick, and the fousled effect was not unpretty. Her body —

D'Ormand sat up. Until that instant, he

hadn't noticed the difference between her and the others. She was dressed. She had on a long, dark, form-fitting gown, made incongruous by the way her bare feet protruded from the voluminous skirt.

Dressed! Now there could be no doubt. This was for him. But what was he expected to do?

Desperate, D'Ormand stared at the woman. Her eyes were like dead jewels staring back at him. He felt a shaken wonder: What incredible thoughts were going on behind those shining windows of her mind? They were like closed doors beyond which was a mental picture of a world three million years older than his own.

The idea was unsettling. Queer little twisting movements blurred along his nerves. He thought: Woman was the nodal, man the anodal. All power grew out of their relationship, especially as the anodal could set up connections with three or more nodal.

D'Ormand forced his mind to pause there. Had he thought that? Never.

A jerky thrill made a circuit through him. For once more, the strange neural method of communication of these people had stolen upon him unawares. And this time he knew that one or four women could form a relationship with a man. Which seemed to explain why there were so many women.

His excitement began to drain. So what? It still didn't explain why this woman was here so near him. Unless this was some fantastic offer of marriage.

D'Ormand studied the woman again. There came to him finally the first sardonicism he had known in months. Because after twelve years of evading the enticements of marriageable young women, he was caught at last. There was no such thing as not verifying that this woman had come over to marry him.

The man's threats had made preternaturally clear that he was working under a time limit. He crept over, took her in his arms, and kissed her. In crises, he thought, action must be straightforward, unconscious, without guile.

After a moment he forgot that. The woman's lips were soft and passive. There was not resistance in them, nor, on the

other hand, was there any awareness of the meaning of the kisses. Putting his lips to hers was like caressing a small child; the same immeasurable innocence was there.

Her eyes, so near his own now, were lighted pools of uncomprehending non-resistance, of passivity so great that it was abnormal. Immensely clear it was that this young woman had never even heard of kisses. Her eyes glowed at him with an alien indifference — that ended.

Amazingly, it ended. Those pools of light widened, grew visibly startled. And she drew away, a quick, lithe movement that carried her in some effortless fashion all the way to her feet. Instantly she turned and walked off. She became a shadowy figure that did not look back.

D'Ormand stared after her uneasily. There was a part of him that wanted to take ironic satisfaction out of the rout he had inflicted. But the conviction that the defeat was his grew with each passing second. It was he who was working against time. And his first attempt to adjust to the life of the dark ship was a failure.

Uneasiness faded, but did not go away entirely. And D'Ormand made no effort to push it further. It was well to remember that he had had a warning. A warning that either meant something or didn't. Folly to assume that it didn't.

He lay back, his eyes closed. He was not reacting well. An entire period he had been within the pure life of Iir, and still he was not becoming attuned.

Eh! D'Ormand started. He hadn't thought that.

He jerked up, opening his eyes. Then he shrank back. Fire-eyed men stood in a rough circle around him. He had no time to wonder how they had gathered so quickly.

They acted. One of them put out his hand. Out of nothingness a knife flashed into it, a knife that glowed in every element of its long blade. Simultaneously, the others leaped forward, grabbed D'Ormand, and held him. Instantly, that living knife plunged down towards his breast.

He tried to shriek at them. His mouth, his face and throat-muscles worked in convulsive pantomime of speech, but no sounds came. The airless night of space

mocked his human horror.

D'Ormand shrank in a stark anticipation of agony, as that blade ripped through his flesh and began to cut. There was no pain, not even sensation. It was like dying in a dream, except for the realism of his writhing and jerking, and at the same time, he watched with a dazed intensity the course of the knife.

They took out his heart; and D'Ormand glared at it like a madman as one of the demon-things held it in his hand, and seemed to be examining it.

Insanely, the heart lay in the monster's palm, lay there beating with a slow, steady pulse.

D'Ormand ceased struggling. Like a bird fascinated by the beady eyes of a snake, he watched the vivisection of his own body.

They were, he saw at last with a measure of sanity, putting each organ back as soon as they had looked at it. Some they studied longer than others — and there was no doubt finally that improvements had been achieved.

Out of his body came knowledge. Even in that first moment, he had a dim understanding that the only drawback to perfect reception of the knowledge now was that he was translating it into thoughts. The information was all emotion. It tingled along his nerves, titillated with subtle inflections, promised a million strange joys of existence.

SLOWLY, LIKE an interpreter who understands neither language, D'Ormand transformed that wonderous flow into mind-forms. It changed as he did so. The brilliance seemed to shed from it. It was like squeezing the life out of some lively little animal, and then staring disappointedly at the dead body.

But the facts, hard and stripped of beauty, poured into his brain: They were the *lir*. This platform was not a ship; it was a force field. It moved where they willed it to go. To be one with the life energy; that was the greatest joy of existence, reserved by Nature Herself for men. The nodal power of women was necessary to the establishment of the field, but man, the anodal power, was the only centre of the glorious

energy.

The strength of the energy depended on the unity of purpose of every member of the ship; and as battle with another platform ship was imminent, it was vital that the *lir* attain the greatest possible measure of union and purity of existence; for only thus would they be able to muster that extra reserve of energy necessary to victory.

He, D'Ormand, was the jarring factor. He had already rendered one woman temporarily useless as a nodal force. He must adjust — swiftly.

The wonder knife withdrew from his flesh, vanished into the nothingness from which it had been drawn; and the men withdrew like naked ghosts into the dimness.

D'Ormand made no attempt to follow their progress through the night. He felt exhausted, his brain battered by the cold-blooded violence of the action that had been taken against him.

He had no illusions. For a few minutes his staggered and overwhelmed mind had been so close to insanity that, even now, it was going to be touch and go. In all his life, he had never felt so depressed, which was a sure sign.

Thought came slowly to his staggered mind: Surely, the ability to live in space was a product of the most radical evolution over a tremendous period of time. And yet the *lir* had adjusted him, who had never gone through that evolution. Strange.

It didn't matter. He was here in hell, and the logic of why it couldn't be had no utility. He must adjust mentally. Right now!

D'Ormand leaped to his feet. The action, outgrowth of strong determination, brought a sudden awareness of something he hadn't noticed before: gravity!

It was about one G, he estimated quickly. And it wasn't that there was anything unusual about it in a physical sense. Artificial gravity had been common even in his own day. It was simply that, though the *lir* might not realize it, its very existence showed their earth origin. For why else should beings who lived in the darkest regions of space need anything like that? Why, when it came right down to it, did they need a ship?

D'Ormand allowed himself a grim smile at the evidence that human beings remained illogical after three million years, felt better for his brief humor — and put the paradox out of his mind.

HE HEADED straight for the space-boat. It wasn't that there was any hope in him. It was just that, now that he was going to force every issue, explore every possibility, his spaceship could not be missed out.

But disappointment did come, a twisting tide of it. He tugged, and pulled determinedly, but the mechanism remained lifeless to his touch. He peered in, finally, at one of the portholes; and his brain banged inside his head, as he saw something that, in his previous more frantic surveys, he had missed because the instruments in question were edgewise to him. There was a glow; the power dials were shining in their faint fashion.

The power was on.

D'Ormand gripped the porthole so tightly that he had to force himself to relax before his mind could grasp at the tremendous thing that was here. The power was on. Somehow, in landing on the dark ship, perhaps in that last terrible will to escape, he had left the controls on. But then — a vast amazement struck D'Ormand — why hadn't the machine raged off? It must still have a terrific latent velocity.

It could only mean that the gravity of the platform must have absolutely no relation to his original conception. One G for him, yes. But for a resisting, powered machine it must provide anything necessary.

The lir weren't responsible for keeping him out of his ship. For purest safety reasons, the airlocks of these small space-boats wouldn't open while the power was on. They were built that way. As soon as the energy drained below a certain point, the door would again respond to simple manipulations.

All he had to do was to stay alive till it would again open, then use the fullest application of his emergency power to blast away from the platform. Surely, the platform wouldn't be able to hold him against the uttermost pressure of atomic drivers.

The hope was too great to let any doubt

dissolve it. He had to believe that he could get away, and that in the meanwhile he would be able to find the young woman, placate her, and examine this anodal-universe energy business.

He must survive the battle.

TIME PASSED. He was a night-clothed figure in that world of darkness, wandering, searching for the young woman he had kissed, while above him the bright galaxy visibly changed its position.

Failure made him desperate. Twice, D'Ormand sank down beside groups composed of a man and several women. He waited beside them for a communication, or for the offer of another woman. But no information came. No woman so much as looked at him.

D'Ormand could only think of one explanation for their utter indifference: They must know he was now willing to conform. And that satisfied them.

Determined to be encouraged, D'Ormand returned to his lifeboat. He tugged tentatively at the mechanism of the airlock. When it did not react, he lay down on the hard deck, just as the platform swerved sharply.

There was no pain, but the jar must have been of enormous proportions. He was sliding, sliding along the deck, ten . . . twenty . . . a hundred feet. It was all very blurred and swift; and he was still lying there, gathering his startled mind into a coherent whole, when he saw the second ship.

The ship was a platform that looked about the same size as the one he was on. It filled the whole sky to his right. It was coming down at a slant; and that must be why the lir ship had turned so violently — to meet its opponent on a more level basis.

D'Ormand's mind was throbbing like an engine, his nerves shaking. He thought: This was madness, nightmare. What was happening couldn't be real. Utterly excited he half rose, the better to see the great spectacle.

Beneath him, the lir-platform turned again. This time there was a faint shock. He was flung prostrate, but his hands broke his fall. Instantly, he was up again, staring in a fever of interest.

He saw that the huge platforms had been brought to a dead level, one with the other. They were pressed deck to deck. On the vast expanse of the second ship were men and women, naked, indistinguishable from the lir; and the tactical purpose of the initial maneuvers was now, it seemed to D'Ormand, clear.

It was to be an old-fashioned, piratical, immeasurably bloody boarding party.

... Force himself, D'Ormand thought. Under no circumstances must he be a jarring factor in the great events that were about to burst upon the unoffending heavens.

Trembling with excitement, he sat down. The action was like a cue. Out of the night the young woman bore down upon him. She came at a run. She still had on the dark gown. It was a hindrance of which she seemed but dimly aware. She flung herself on the deck in front of him. Her eyes glowed like large ovals of amber, so bright they were with excitement and — D'Ormand felt a shock — dread.

The next instant his nerves tingled and quivered with the weight and intensity of the emotion-forms that projected from her: She was being given another chance, the startling message came. If he would use her successfully now to make himself an anodal centre, it would help to win the great victory; and she would not suffer exile. She had bedimmed the forces of purity by liking what he had done to her.

There was more. But it was at that point that D'Ormand's mind ceased translating. He sat amazed. It hadn't really struck him before, but he remembered suddenly the men had said he had already ruined one woman temporarily as a nodal centre.

With one kiss!

THE OLD, old relationship of man and woman had, then, not lost its potency. He had a sudden vision of himself racing around like a thief in the night stealing kisses from every woman he could find, thoroughly disorganizing the dark ship.

With convulsive mental effort, he forced the idea out of his head. Silly, stupid fool! he raved at himself. Even having thoughts like that when every element in his body should be concentrating on the supremely

important task of co-operating with these people, and staying alive. He would make himself live up to their demands.

The young woman pushed at him violently. D'Ormand returned to reality. For an instant, he resisted. Then her purpose penetrated: Sit crossed-legged, hold her hands, and lose his mind . . .

Physically, D'Ormand complied. He watched her take up a kneeling position facing him. She took his hands finally in her own, and closed her eyes. She looked as if she were praying.

EVERYWHERE, HE saw, men and women were forming into groups where the man sat cross-legged and the women knelt. At first, because of the dimness, it was difficult to see exactly how two or more women and one man managed it. But almost immediately he saw such a group to his left. The four simply formed a small circle, a chain of linked hands.

D'Ormand's mind and gaze plunged off towards the second ship. There, too, men and women were sitting, holding hands.

The stars looked down in that hour, it seemed to D'Ormand's straining senses, on a sight they were never meant to see, the ultimate in prayerful preliminary to battle. With a bleak and terrible cynicism, he waited for the purifying sessions to end, waited for the glowing knives to flash out of empty space, and come alive in the eager hands that were probably even now itching for action.

Cynicism . . . the ultimately depressing fact that after thirty hundred thousand years . . . there was still war. War completely changed, but war!

It was at that black moment that he became an anodal centre. There was a stirring in his body, *something* pulsing. It was an electric shock, no agony of burning. It was a singing flame that grew in intensity. And grew. And grew. It became an exultation, and took on a kaleidoscope of physical forms.

Space grew visibly brighter. The galaxy flared towards him. Suns that had been blurred points in the immense sky billowed into monstrous size as his glance touched them, sinking back to point size as his gaze swept on.

Distance dissolved. All space grew small, yielding to the supernal ken that was his. A billion galaxies, quadrillion planets reeled their manifold secrets before his awful vision.

He saw nameless things before his colossal mind came back from that inconceivable plunge into infinity. Back at the dark ship at last, it saw, in its unlimited fashion, the purpose of the battle that was proceeding. It was a battle of minds, not bodies; and the victor would be that ship, whose members succeeded in using the power of both ships to merge themselves with the universal force.

Self-immolation was the high goal of each crew. To be one with the Great Cause, forever and ever to bathe one's spirit in the eternal energy, to —

To what?

The quaver of revulsion came from deep, deep inside D'Ormand. And the ecstasy ended. It was as swift as that. He had a quick, vivid comprehension that, in his wild horror of the destiny the *lir* regarded victory, he had let go the girl's hands, broken the contact with the universal energy. And now he was sitting here in darkness.

D'ORMAND CLOSED his eyes, and shook in every nerve, fighting the renewal of that hideous shock. What a diabolical, incredible fate, the most terrifying aspect of which was the narrowness of his escape.

Because the *lir* had been winning. The destiny of the dissolution they craved was to be theirs . . . D'Ormand thought finally, wanly: That anodal stuff wasn't bad in itself. But he wasn't spiritually ready to merge with the great forces of darkness.

Darkness? His mind poised. For the first time he grew conscious of something that, in the intensity of his emotional relief, he hadn't previously noticed. He was no longer sitting on the deck of the *lir* ship. There wasn't any deck.

And it was damned dark.

In a contortion of movement, D'Ormand twisted — and saw the second dark ship. It was high in the heavens, withdrawing into distance. It vanished even as he was looking at it.

Then the battle was over. But what?

Darkness! All around! And instantly certainty came of what was here: The *lir* had won. They were now in their glory, ecstatic portions of the universal energy itself. With its creators gone, the platform had returned to a more elemental energy state, and become non-existent. But what about his spaceboat?

Panic poured in waves through D'Ormand. For a moment, he strove desperately to see in all directions at once, straining his vision against the enveloping night. In vain. Comprehension of what had happened came in the very midst of his search.

The spaceship must have departed the instant the platform-ship dissolved. With its enormous latent velocity, with power still on, the machine had shot away at ninety million miles a second.

He was alone in the vast night, floating in intergalactic space.

This was exile.

The first vaulting passion of his fears folded back, layer on layer, into his body. The accompanying thoughts ran their gamuts, and passed wearily to a store-room of forgotten things somewhere in his brain.

There would be a lot of that, D'Ormand reflected grimly. What was left of his sane future would be an endless series of feelings and thoughts, each in its turn fading with the hours. Mind pictures would come of the young woman.

D'Ormand's thought jumbled. He frowned in a frantic surmise, and jerked his head this way, that way. He saw the shape of her finally, faintly silhouetted against a remote hazy galaxy.

She was quite near, he estimated after a blank, frenzied movement, not more than twelve feet. They would gradually drift towards each other, and begin to spin in the manner of greater bodies, but the orbit would be exceedingly close.

It would be close enough for instance for them to establish a nodal-anodal circuit. With that Olympian, all-embracing power, he would locate his spaceship, flash towards and into it, instantaneously.

Thus did night and aloneness end.

INSIDE THE spaceboat, D'Ormand busied himself with plotting his position.

He was acutely aware of the young woman hovering around him, but the work demanded all his attention. First, he must locate by patient hit and miss methods the new galactic latitude and longitude of the great beacon of the skies, Antares. From that it would be simple to find the 3,000,000 A.D. position of glorious Mira.

Mira wasn't there.

D'Ormand flexed his fingers in puzzlement, then he shrugged. Betelgeuse would do just as well.

But Betelgeuse didn't. There was a big red star of its dimensions more than 103 light years short of where the super-giant should have been. But that was ridiculous. Such a thing would require a reversal of his figures.

D'Ormand began to tremble. With wavering pen, he plotted the position of Sol according to the devastating possibility that had just smashed at him.

He had not gone into the future at all, but into the past. And the time machine must have wrenched itself badly out of alignment, for it had sent him to approximately 37,000 B.C.

D'Ormand's normal thought processes surred a great pause. *Men then?*

With an effort, D'Ormand turned to the young woman. He seated himself cross-legged on the floor, and beckoned her to kneel and take his hands. One instant of anodal power would take the ship and its contents to earth, and prove everything.

He saw with sharp surprise that the girl was making no move towards him. Her eyes, gently brown in the suffused light, stared at him coolly.

She didn't seem to understand. D'Ormand climbed to his feet, walked over, pulled at her arm, and motioned her down to the floor.

She jerked away. D'Ormand gazed at her, shocked. Even as the realization penetrated that she had determined never again to be a nodal auxiliary, she came forward, put her arms around him, and kissed him.

D'Ormand flung her off. Then, astounded at his brutality, patted her arm. Very slowly, he returned to the control chair. He began to figure out orbits, the braking strengths of the nearest suns, and the

quantity of power remaining for his drivers. It would take seven months, he reasoned, long enough to teach the girl the rudiments of speech . . .

Her first coherent word was her own version of his name. She called him Idorm, a distortion that rocked D'Ormand back on his mental heels. It decided him on the name he would give her.

By the time they landed on a vast, virgin planet alive with green forests, the earnest should of her halting voice had largely dispelled her alienness.

It was easier by then to think of her as Eve, the mother of all men. ●



Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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THE OLD MAN looked both stooped and tall at the same time. He wore a hide from a long dead animal and it was brown from the years of sun as was his skin. His long bushy hair was speckled with clumps of grey and melded without a change of shading into the full beard that fell to his chest. Other smaller skins bound with dark rawhide strips covered his feet and ankles. In his right hand he held a bow made from an automobile spring and the metal was smooth where his hand had gripped it many times.

The sun was a red haze on the horizon as the day began. In two more days it would be his birthday. He had no calendar or timepiece, but he knew, and he sighed as he made his way up the hill to the mouth of the cave in which he lived.

The cave was a dark maw in the hillside and it was shielded from the wind and the rain by a stand of tall poplars. It was large and held an army cot covered with furs and one wall was a bookcase made from logs. The books were many, but they were dirty and yellow from age, and he had not touched them for a long time. The old man had no desire to read anymore. The multicolored volumes had taken on a patina of murkiness that made them foreign to him and maybe he would burn them when the rains came and the wood was too wet to kindle his fire.

He placed his morning's kill, a scraggly rabbit, on the low flat rock near the fire pit and began to prepare his meal. As he skinned away the clumpy fur, he thought that this would be the last time he would eat for two days. He found that he could not bring himself to eat when the event was so near. Afterward he would hunt again and gorge himself, maybe a small deer or boar, but for now his appetite was poor and he forced himself to mechanically consume the stringy flesh so that he would not become sick before the event.

The old man finished his breakfast and sat with his hands in his lap waiting. It was almost time to start, but he did not want to begin too early. The event had become a holy ritual after twenty years and it had to be done according to plan. The nagging fear that something would not work was creeping into his mind and he tried to subdue it by thinking of other things but it was no use. Only twice had there been a problem and he had managed to fix it easily. But if something major went wrong he might not be able to remember the necessary steps to take and that frightened him. But just to look at it again, he thought, would be

Ron Montana

THE LAST PICASSO

enough. Someday that would be all he was able to do and he knew he had to adjust to that eventuality.

He shook aside the doubts and rose and left the cave. The sun was breaking through the dingy overcast as the old man trod the tree shadowed path to the road. Standing in the center of what had been Highway 17, he looked both ways, inspecting the freeway for obstacles. The wind blew strongly through the valley and kept the road free of most debris. The timber line was far enough back so that falling trees presented no barriers. Even after all these years it was still possible.

He nodded and began walking up the middle of the road. He started his trek very slowly, almost limping with the weight of the age he bore on his hunched shoulders. As he neared his destination he began to move faster, anticipation tingling the balls of his feet.

He had to stop at the dirt road that angled upward to his left and hack away at a growth of weeds that were almost as tall as he was. His knife blade bit into the roots and he was angered as he pulled the stubborn stalks free from the hard ground and he knew he shouldn't be, he had to perform the task annually and by now it should be just a matter of routine. Maybe this year he would go into the old barn and look for some defoliant. Yes, that's what he would do, but he had the feeling that he would be hacking away at the same weeds next year if he were still alive. They were important. They gave him pause and the thought of changing anything after so long a time made him feel ashamed and his hands trembled as he cleared the last of the brush away.

When he had finished with the weeds, he started up the dirt path, carefully picking small rocks off its rutted surface and tossing them into the trees that marched beside him up the hill. It was an effort to get all the rocks and it took up precious time but he went about the task abstractedly, not really seeing the stones. By the time he reached the crest of the ridge he was panting. He stared down into the clearing and he could not remember if he had been this tired last year and that worried him. What if he did not have the strength that was required? The thought left his mind like a fleeting butterfly as his eyes focused on the clearing.

The main house was almost gone, moss and thick growth covered it from the broken porch to the missing roof. It was barely an outline in the underbrush and if he had not lived in it for so long he would not have known it was there. His body sagged as he stared at the ruin for a long time. It hurt him to remember but the pain was not new to him and he did not know why it should be different this year.

The memories were dulled and blunt but he could remember standing on the exact same spot twenty years ago and watching the house burn. There had been people inside and the old man could still hear their faint screams over the roar of the flames and the slight breeze that rustled the tops of the tall trees. He thought that he should remember their names. Those people that had been his family were stacked under years of forgotten memories and he made no great effort to summon them out of the depths of his consciousness.

The barn was not in much better condition than the house and he gave it a passing glance as his eyes moved to the door that was set into the rock of the far hillside. The door was dirty and peeling and he walked to it and hit it hard with the palm of his hand. The dust flew and the galvanized steel twanged under the

blow. He smiled, more a relaxing of his tight lips than a grin, and reached for the silver chain he wore around his neck. The chain bore two keys. He inserted the smaller one into the lock and heaved upward. The door rose smoothly and clanked to a stop.

The old man stood up straight and took a deep breath, throwing his shoulders back in relief as he looked inside the garage. The cement floor was coated with a year's worth of dust but even in the gloom he could see that everything was as he had left it. He walked to the far wall in the pitch blackness but he did not stumble or falter as he made his way around the dark hump in the center of the garage. After all this time he knew where everything was and he could have gone through the motions even had he been blind.

He lifted a red plastic gas can and placed it under the spigot of the two hundred gallon tank that took up most of the wall. When the can was full he went to the generator beside the tank and fueled it. It was time. He flipped the 'on' switches and his hand found the knotted cord at the side of the generator. He pulled the cord once, twice. The generator coughed, then it caught on the third pull as it always had. The garage came alive with the sound of the gasoline engine smoothing out as he choked it and the overhead phosphorescences flickered, then burst into a sunscape of white light.

The old man blinked and rubbed at his eyes. When his vision had adjusted to the sudden artificial light he looked at the object in the center of the floor. It was shrouded by a green formfitting cover, but its outline was as familiar to him as were the creases in his hands.

He stepped forward and removed the cover gently, reverently, and folded it neatly into a square of cloth that he placed on a shelf. He felt his heart leap in his chest as he turned back to look upon the car.

It was a 1978 Datsun 280 Z Two plus Two. It was a deep burgundy with gold and silver striping and even the dust that had filtered through the cloth cover did not mar its lustrous finish. It crouched on the cement like a mountain cat waiting to spring and the old man admired it from different angles as he walked slowly around it several times.

Finally he lifted the gas cap door and poured the remainder of the gas from the can into the car's tank. Putting the can down he went to his stomach and inspected the right front tire. It was dangerously low. He took a pump from a wall mount and filled the tire, checking it with a pressure gauge from his tool box. Only when he was completely satisfied that the exterior of the vehicle was sound did the old man open the driver's door. A *whoosh* of stale air hit him in the face and he rolled down both windows, leaning across the driver's seat carefully so that he would not touch the smooth black leather with his dirty garments.

Lifting the hood he attached a cable from the charger to the battery terminals and then connected the charger plug to the idling generator. His movements were precise and his hands steady even though he knew a dozen things could go wrong. The battery had been in the car for four years and it was his last one. He knew he would not be able to find another one and so he prayed as the charger needles vibrated behind their glass covers.

The car had 7800 miles on it that day the house had burned and he did not have to look at the speedometer to know that it now registered 8360. He had driven it twenty eight miles every day on his birthday for the last twenty years.

Fourteen miles to where the big rock slide blocked the freeway just outside of Santa Cruz and fourteen miles back. His hands felt electric at the thought of those drives and he grabbed a frayed towel, a bar of soap and a scissors from a shelf and hurried outside, unable to withhold his excitement any longer.

At the stream that came from the spring in the hillside he waded into the hip deep water and it was cold, but he did not notice the chill. He removed the hides he wore and flung them to the bank and stood naked in the bubbling water. He used the soap vigorously, scrubbing away at the grime that coated his body. When he was finished he looked at the sliver in his hand and thought that the case of soap would probably last longer than the gasoline. One bar of soap a year. He laughed loudly at that and the sound of his voice startled him as it echoed back from the trees.

Wading to the bank he sat and picked up the scissors. It took him ten minutes to shave his beard and scrape his face with the edge of the scissor's blade. This time he did not cut himself and he knew that was a good omen. He trimmed his hair without looking at his image in the swirling water because it was not time to see himself yet. He cut it so that it fell just over his ears and it was a poor job but the old man did not know that because he had nothing to compare with anymore.

Picking up the towel he dried himself and walked back into the garage. He took a dust cloth from a drawer in the workbench and stood beside the car, his thin calves shaking, the matted black hair on his legs and chest curling against the coolness of the garage. He leaned over the car, caressing away the specks of dust and dirt and the damp spots that had formed under the car cover when the humidity reached its peak in the long summer months. The battery charger sang in the background and he pressed his body against the hatch back and reached up to wipe at the rear of the sloping roof line. He allowed the cloth to barely touch the metal as if he were the custodian of a museum cleaning a rare painting. This was the good part, he remembered. It was almost as good as what was to come.

But suddenly the horrible loneliness was back, gripping his intestines like a steel vice. He and the event were the only things that really mattered, he assured himself. He had had fantasies of going back to a time when he could share his masterpiece with others, those who would appreciate it. But they were only dreams, nobody was there to hear the tree fall in the forest anymore. He was the lone caretaker and the things he did were private things. But that was good, there was nobody left to judge him — or more importantly — laugh at him.

His erection stiffened on the fender and he hugged the car, moving his body in up and down motions as the pressure grew in his loins. At last he spent his seed on the ground, stepping away from the car at the proper time so as not to mar the thick coat of polish on the paint.

Some of his semen dripped on the wire wheel and he cursed as he rubbed at the spoke with the cloth to remove the stain. Guilt gripped the old man's stomach but he did not know if it came from what he had just done or because he had defiled the automobile.

He polished the spoke until it gleamed then went to a metal locker, opened it and began to dress. There was a draped full-length mirror beside the locker and when he was finished he moved to it and pulled away the curtain. The old man never uncovered the mirror until he was dressed because he did not want to see himself as he had been.

He gazed into the bluish glass and saw Martin Rismiller staring back at him. The face in the reflection was a deep tan except where the pasty white skin had been covered by the beard. And he was not an old man. He was forty-five years old and today was his birthday. He stood tall in his rust colored turtleneck sweater and expensively pre-faded levis. His shoes were Italian leather and he wore a 24 carat gold ID bracelet on his wrist and he smiled as he pulled on a brown leather jacket and driving gloves. The clothing still fit and he was glad of that. Without it he would have been nothing.

The photo-sensitive Foster Grants were in the rack on the dashboard and he placed them over his eyes as he settled into the high back driver's seat. He sat there with both hands on the black leather covered steering wheel, gripping it tightly until he knew his knuckles must be white under the gloves. Then he put the gear shift lever into neutral and placed his foot on the clutch. Taking the key he now wore over his sweater he placed it in the ignition, expelled a deep breath and turned it.

The starter whined and the engine caught. The regular tune-up he had performed after each run had been well worth the time spent, he thought, as he watched the tach needle hover at 1100. The oil pressure gauge climbed to normal and the alternator needle quivered in the charge zone. The trip gauge read 28 and he adjusted it to zero before he got out and disconnected the battery cables and shut off the charger. He let the car warm up for five minutes. Then he pulled the safety harness across his body and made one more check of the instruments.

He shifted into first and let the clutch out slowly and the Z moved forward out of the garage. He brought it to a stop testing the brakes. Then he revved the engine. With the window down he could hear the deep-throated roar of the motor reverberating over the mountains. It was a good sound and he loved it. A throbbing but subdued melody that hummed up through the thick carpeting, up his legs and to his shoulders. It came at him from all directions and it was intoxicating.

Martin released the emergency brake and eased out into the center of the clearing. The high sun blazed off the burgandy paint as the Z came out of the shadow of the hillside and it shone like a mirror, throwing dancing reflections everywhere like a laser beam of wine light that bounced back from the mountain greens and browns.

Martin felt powerful as he removed an eight track tape from the center console and inserted it into the movable door in the radio. He had tried the radio first for many years but he had given that up and was more than satisfied with the one tape he had left. The others had worn or broken but he was thankful that the Blaupunkt still functioned at all. He clicked the tape home and the sounds of Chuck Berry singing *Johnny B. Goode* burst out on the clearing like a cannon barrage. Birds flew in ruffled patterns across the tree tops and a squirrel stopped nibbling and stared disapprovingly at the car, then disappeared up a tree. Martin smiled at the scurrying rodent and lowered the volume a bit. Then he carefully maneuvered the car down the dirt path to the freeway.

He had the urge to gun the Z and careen down the path but he checked that impulse knowing that if he broke a tie rod or a shock it would not be worth it. When he reached the edge of Highway 17 he stopped and listened to the idling engine. It was running smoothly and he goosed it twice and watched the tach

needle bounce joyfully. He nosed the car ahead until he could see all the road, then looked both ways before pulling out.

The stretch of freeway in front of him was straight as a string for two hundred yards, then banked gracefully into a series of shallow curves. He let out the clutch and depressed the accelerator. The Z responded without hesitation as it always had. He watched the tach run up to 4500 and then he shifted quickly into second. The tires squealed as the car leaped forward, flattening out as the engine labored effortlessly. It flew down the straightaway as Martin looked out over the blunt hood for possible obstructions.

He shifted into third as the Z began its leftward bank into the first turn. The speedometer needle crept to 70, then 75. He eased off the gas a bit knowing the curves were going to get sharper. He was grinning like a baby and the music was loud and fast and the breeze past the open window was fresh.

Chuck Berry began singing *Maybellene* and Martin laughed loudly and sang along as he guided the Z through the curves at 65, gearing down occasionally then jamming the gas pedal to the floor as he came out of the turns.

When he started the long upgrade outside Scotts Valley the trip gauge read 8. Six more miles, he thought as he slowed, not wanting to reach his destination too rapidly. Just short of the crest he shifted into fourth and the speedometer needle jumped to 90. Martin felt sad that he could not maintain the strength of his convictions but that passed quickly as the car sailed over the crest and began its downhill run.

Martin's right hand rested on the shift lever and the vibration of the automobile coursed through his hand and up his arm. He went violently into third and his body strained against the chest harness as the car leaned dangerously into the first curve on the far side of the crest. He went into the turn too fast and he knew it. He felt the rear end lift slightly as the Z began to drift. The rear tires fought for traction and Martin knew he should let up and shift, but he waited, feeling the sideways motion of the car floating him into a hypnotic state.

The Z's drift became a slide and Martin watched the granite cliff approaching as the car's rear end broke away completely. He snapped out of his trance and touched the brakes twice, short jabs as he ground the gear lever into second and then hit the gas.

The Z car growled like a wounded animal and squatted on its Michelin claws as it struggled to balance itself. Martin twisted the wheel in the direction of the slide and straightened its trajectory and shot ahead, missing the side of the cliff by inches. Martin laughed crazily over the sound of the engine and the music. That was as close as he had ever come. But that was what it was all about. And if she didn't like it then it was too bad. It was his birthday.

The ghost of his long dead wife chided him for being reckless and he scowled and looked over at her in the passenger seat. Her long nails were biting into the dash and he watched her forehead line as she narrowed her large brown eyes and squinted ahead. He looked at the short black hair framing the oval face and he wished she would smile so he could see the old happiness again. But she never smiled anymore and that was sad.

*Tell me who's the queen
Standin' by the record machine
Lookin' like a model
On the cover of a magazine . . .*

He sighed at the truth of the lyrics as he brought his eyes back to the road. The trip gauge read 13. Two more turns and he would be on the long downward grade into Santa Cruz. The fallen overpass would block the road like a misplaced skyscraper and he would bring the Z to a halt and look at the pile of cement overgrown with brush. Then he would turn around and make his return run. It would be another full year to his next birthday and he forced himself to think about the approaching curve.

The Z came out of the last turn and Martin stared straight ahead, dumbfounded. His right foot jammed the brake involuntarily and the tires screamed as the Z car spun in a full circle and came to a grinding halt in a cloud of dust on the shoulder of the road. The engine had died because he had not bothered to engage the clutch and the jolt of the stop had ejected the tape from the deck.

It was very quiet. Martin just sat and looked ahead. The jumble of stone that had been the freeway overpass had been split as if a giant hand had descended from above in a massive karate chop. He could see the freeway on the other side of the gap and it was clear and uncluttered. His mind worked furiously. That tremor he had felt in the pass two months ago must have been a reasonably large quake. It had cleared a path in the blockage big enough for him to drive through.

He released the chest harness and got out of the car, taking with him the pair of field glasses he used to spot the road for fallen trees. The freeway bed where the rubble had rested was cracked and buckled but it was passable. He could get the Z through without scraping a fender. Something in the distance caught his eye. It was a cloud of rising smoke. He picked his way up the side of the overpass, careful not to dirty his clothing and climbed out on a square of cement that overlooked the harbor. Standing there in the sunlight he raised the glasses to his eyes.

In the harbor several small boats with patched sails stood at anchor. Most of the structures in the town were collapsed but here and there he could see a few in good repair. Smoke from cook fires rose from these huts and he could hear the laughter of playing children in the still air. He could see women with babies at their breasts, old men with grey beards and half-naked boys practicing with spears and bows. Men worked on the boats, their sun darkened skin gleamed with perspiration. Life. People. So he was not the only one left. His eyes filled with tears as he watched the scene below and he felt pain, real pain, for the first time in twenty years. A burning hurt that welled up from his stomach and choked off his breath.

They had not managed to kill everybody off, he thought, as the tears rolled like waves down his cheeks. Wiping at his eyes he let the field glasses sag in his hand as he made his way back to the car. He had a determined expression on his face as he started the engine and ran the car up to the edge of the gap in the overpass. He sat there with the engine revving, thinking about the looks on their faces when he came roaring down the road, horn blaring, music playing. They would think him a god and he recalled the Wells' book, *Time Machine*. What had the people been called? The ELOI? He would be the chief and his life would take on a meaning, a purpose. He would be king in the country of the blind.

Or a freak in the kingdom of the normal. He looked over at his wife and she

smiled at him. He returned the grin and shifted into reverse. Doing a Highway Patrol turnaround he kicked the Z car in the ass and it sped away from the village and the people below.

Maybe next year, the old man thought.

Or the year after. ●

AFTERWORD FOR "THE LAST PICASSO"

I guess I'm just a sucker for 'after the fall' type stories; have been since I was a kid. I've always been extremely curious how Clyde or Mildred Average would react to a world suddenly thrust back in time a thousand years or more, how he or she would adjust to a stone age existence that was liberally sprinkled with bits and pieces of modern technology, and all the while plagued with the knowledge that the 'Old Ones' had destroyed the Big Mac and the

pantyhose revolution as we know it.

Unfortunately there are so many already traveled paths a story like that can take it is sometimes impossible to envision a fresh approach without stumbling into the old traps. I hope fervently that civilization never reaches the blow-up stage. That would, of course, severely limit writing about the outcome of 'the fall' once that outcome has become a way of life . . . Or would it?—RM

TWO MILLION YEARS AND COUNTING

Radioactive rain fell on thatched roofs
of multi-tiered skyscrapers as
monsoon winds blew clear smog
into clean, oily ocean
Wounded pterodactyl flamed out and
nosed slowly into earth at mach four.
Man stood on a hill and looked down
on steaming jungle of scrap metal and bones,
in one hand he held a stone axe,
in the other a pocket calculator.
He looked confused.

—Ron Montana





OPEN LETTER TO THE SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY WORLD:

My First Letter was published in 1929 in Hugo Gernsback's *Science Wonder Quarterly*. This is not my Last Letter but it is a historic one. Actually, since I aim to be accurate, I am writing this on April 1st but feel I dare not start off with that date because I have been publicized for so many years as the world's (make that worlds') greatest collector of imaginative literature and memorabilia, who would take seriously the bombshell that, as I approach my 55th year in the fantasy field and 65th year in this maelstrom of madness called "life," I AM GIVING UP COLLECTING? On a buying basis, that is. Might as well expect me to stop breathing, right?

Well, unfortunately, not being a *totally* unrealistic individual with his feet on the clouds and his head in the stars, I've come to the realization that I better cool it on trying to purchase *every* hardcover (domestic and foreign, past, present and future), *every* paperback, *every* limited edition, *every* calendar, *every* record album, *every* movie still, *every* film poster, *every* motion picture pressbook, *every* space stamp, *every* fanzine, *every* etc., etc., and from here on in leave it up to the consciences of you authors, publishers and fans. I'm a Senior Citizen without a savings account because I've spent every cent I ever made on the Collection and the place to house it. I believe it is universally known I've offered

this 300,000-piece treasure trove to the City of Los Angeles. Free. Not even a tax shelter because, I regret to say, I don't need one! The Mayor says his office is behind a project to create a Museum to preserve and exhibit the collection. Life has not rewarded me financially as richly as it has Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, Steven Spielberg, Stephen King, George Lucas, Larry Niven, Robert Silverberg, Frank Herbert, et al, yet virtually all your works to date, at my expense, are preserved for posterity. In the past 23 years I've edited (more or less written, is more like it) 175 issues of an American publishing phenomenon but for the past two years I've had no cost-of-living increase, editorial purchases have not been reimbursed and last year there was no bonus. When my first issue of *Weird Tales* was stolen I cashed in my Life Insurance policy to buy another copy — just to give it away to LA! When A.E. van Vogt suggested to 135,000 readers of *Analog* that each send me a single dollar bill for support of the archives till the city takes charge, 28 responses were the result. Hopefully the city will have funds to buy. But until then, if you want to keep your work in the collection complete, you'll have to donate it. My address is 2495 Glenwood Ave., Hollywood, CA 90027. My signature is:

Forrest J. Ackerman

Stan Timmons & Mary Stultz **TITMOUSE**

THIS IS RIDICULOUS!" exclaimed the examiner. "Outrageous! Inexcusable!" He blew out an irritated breath, shot a withering, blistering glare at the bookkeeper.

"How could you let such a thing happen?" the auditor demanded as he thumbed the iron-bound ledger shut. "This man, this — Winslow Titmouse — has been paying more into his account than he's been getting back. Don't you understand the gravity of this implication? Don't you realize what a frightful imbalance this creates? Don't you care how many other lives are likewise affected by this little faux pas of yours?"

The smaller, put-upon man gestured weakly, impotently.

"Well," the head examiner said, squaring his shoulders and tugging on the lapels of his smartly-cut jacket, "I'm afraid I'll have to handle this one personally." He knotted his silkiest silk tie around his neck, smiled softly at the cowering accountant.

"Listen," he confided, "between us, the same thing happened with Jimmy the Greek, only he's been getting more out of the system than he's been putting in, but we'll settle that one, too." He drew himself up to his full and noble height of six-two and proclaimed glowingly, "They don't call Julian Wembsleydale the Karma Man for nothing."

He tipped his flocked hat dapperly over one blue eye, wormed his stubby fingers into his rabbit-lined driving gloves and tapped the "Total" button on the small calculator clipped to the breast pocket of his three-piece suit and winked out of that temporal plane.

A FAMILIAR walking stick whacked him alongside his left ankle.

"Sorry, Mrs. Blumquist," apologized Winslow Titmouse, rising to vacate his seat for the old woman. "I forgot." He grabbed one of the hanging straps as the bus rattled on.

"That was very kind of you, Winslow," said Julian.

"Oh, it's all right," Winslow answered without looking. "Really."

"Nevertheless," insisted the gentleman, "I'm going to reward your goodness."



Illustrated by Skip Olson

Winslow felt a hard lump ballooning on the side of his ankle.

"If I'd done it for a reward," Winslow said, finally craning his neck to address the soft-spoken stranger, "then it wouldn't have been a good — are you with the IRS?"

But the man just smiled an easy and winning smile and said, "Julian Wembsleydale, Certified Karmic Accountant at your service."

"Karmic Accountant?" Winslow repeated, but it made no more sense coming from his tongue than it had from Julian's.

"Karma's a very complex thing . . . how can I describe this to you?" The CKA pondered the situation for a moment, scratching at a loose lock of his curly brown hair as if tracing thoughts upon his forehead. His handsome face lit. "Ah! I know: dominoes. You see, a man's life is rather like a procession of dominoes. Once the first block — your first deed in this life — has been struck, it tips over against the next and the next until the whole line eventually falls into place. Understand?"

Winslow nodded. By the look on Julian's face, he seemed anxious that Winslow grasp his point, and rather than offend this man, Winslow made a non-committal grunt which Julian took as leave to proceed.

"Well, that same line of dominoes is like your karma: it continues on and on and on, from beginning to finish, each deed, good or bad, begetting unfailingly another like deed, unless someone removes one of the dominoes from its place in the chain, thus bollixing up the flow. Like a dammed-up river, it can't progress. Events that should happen fail to, and all because one small brick, no more important than another in the chain of things, is misplaced. Or, in other words, your credits exceed your debits."

"Does everyone have a 'Karma Account?'"

"Everyone," replied the adjuster. "Your universe, for all its appearances to the contrary, is an ordered state of affairs, so for every action or inaction, there is an equal reaction. If you did nothing but good deeds all your life, expecting nothing in return, then good things would return to you, although not good exclusively." He added, sotto voice: "There are still a few bugs in the system."

"In like fashion," the CKA hurried on, "if you performed no deeds save cruel and hurtful ones, then the same would be visited upon you, but threefold. Maybe sooner, maybe later, but somewhere, it all has to balance. Time and chance will either curse or bless you."

"In the land beyond beyond, there exists a Book where every deed, every thought, is recorded and rewarded accordingly. Unfortunately, in your case — and probably you've noticed — you've been performing kind acts and receiving only stupid and thoughtless deeds by thanks, sort of a cosmic cream pie in the face."

"Why is that?" Winslow asked idly.

"Oh, uh, our bookkeeper entered your first act in the wrong column and . . . well, it really doesn't matter. The fact is, there's an imbalance in everyone's karma — remember, this is an ordered affair, so all of this extra 'good karma' has to go somewhere, and regrettably, it's been going to even the most heinous of souls, whereas rightfully it should be yours. The only way to balance the books is to grant you 'three wishes,' which are actually an acceleration of your own karma, your destiny, and in some cases, changing the whole complexion of your future, some by shades, some by rods and yards."

But by this time, Winslow's head was awash. It was all too much for him and Julian realized it.

"It's confusing at first," consoled the Karma Man, "and the more you work to understand, the muddier the point gets, but it'll come to you."

The rest of the jostling bus ride was spent in subdued quiet, with Winslow scrutinizing the Karmic Analyst beside him. His ageless face had not a line upon it to rumor of fear or anger or desperation, as did most of the people on the bus. He had a handsome and winning face and a pleasing voice as mellow and rich as a temple bell, and was easy and graceful and without guile, not slouchy and clumsy and deceitful, like the others. An unkind word from Julian would have been as out of place as blood on the face of a baby.

The bus lurched to a stop, air brakes whining. Winslow moved for the door.

"I'll come with you," Julian suggested.

"You really don't have to," Winslow muffled back over his shoulder as he stepped off the idled bus.

But Julian insisted. They stood in front of the tumble-down brewery as the bus lumbered away. The CKA looked to be of more substance than mist and smoke, but people walking by passed through him without notice. Julian gave a comforting wink and smile to Winslow.

"It's like I told you, Winslow: I'm only a spirit, and you alone can see or hear me."

"Are you an angel?"

"No," he answered humbly. "An angel has no conception of bad or good, having been created without Moral Sense, and would thus be ill-equipped to reward or punish, as I do. I'll leave you to digest what I told you, but for now, I'd better get back to the office. I still have to look over Billy Carter's account . . ."

He jabbed the "Total" button and faded to a few sketchy details, like a line drawing on a blackboard, a sculpture carved from a soap bubble. He bounced along the gritty avenue a couple of times and vanished with a barely audible "pop."

Winslow turned and opened the heavy door to the brewery.

"Hello, Winnie!" a familiar voice called out over the bustle and business.

DEBBI JAYE had been a struggling model when she met the man of her dreams at an advertising executives' convention in Cleveland. She'd been hired, for \$75, to pop out of an oversized cake and fraternize tith some old bastards. A Young Turk there caught her eye, a sweet, one-man parade. She spent most of the evening fraternizing with him.

It turned out he was from Cleveland himself, a junior partner in an ad firm, and his star was on the rise.

She soon moved in with him and got jobs modeling a few newspaper ads for his clients, or acting in a couple of local TV spots. Not many months later, he was named account executive of a Chicago-based ad agency, Demkovich, Grier and Kane. In all the excitement and in his rush to get packed and moved, he forgot to take one thing: his girlfriend. Well, no big deal; he could easy get another one in Chicago.

There was nothing for her to do then but take a menial job at the brewery and a room at the "Y" and wait for the times to get better for out-of-work, out-of-luck models.

Debbi started work just down the line from Winslow. Several times she caught the man staring at her, mouth agape, and she would smile a smile that could coax the moon and the sun and the stars down from their orbits. Winslow would flush and stammer and turn his head away and pretend to be engrossed in a spot of greasy hops on the floor. Then the noon whistle blew.

Winslow went to eat his lunch on a rickety wooden bench against the far wall, as usual.

"Meatloaf again," the lunchbox announced before he could open it.

"Yeah, I know, I know," Winslow responded. "Who do you suppose packed you?"

"Oh-oh," the pail hissed. "Don't look now, but here comes that bimbo you've been staring at."

"She's not a bimbo," he reprimanded the impertinent lunchbox.

"She's probably gonna tear you a new asshole for the way you've been ogglin' her all day," the thermos ribbed him.

"She's pretty! I can't help it."

Debbi stood in front of Winslow for a long time before he acknowledged her presence. Even then, he only glanced up and blushed sheepishly.

"Look," she said, sitting beside him on the swayback bench. He sidled away from her. She pretended not to notice. "Look, you've been staring at me all morning. Is something the matter?"

"No, no. It's just that I'd never seen you before."

"You act like you've never seen a girl before," she said with no small amount of sarcasm. "By the way, I'm Debbi."

"Oh. I'm Winslow. Winslow Titmouse."

The introductions were over. He couldn't think of anything else to say. He ate his sandwich slowly.

"My God, this is fun," said the thermos.

Winslow scowled.

Debbi began abruptly. "Pickles would be good with that. I brought along a jar of dill pickles and I can't get them open. You can have one if you like — that is, if you can get the jar open."

"This guy?" the lunchbox exclaimed. "He can barely open his mouth, let alone a jar of pickles."

"It's a feminine ploy," warned the paranoid thermos. "It's the old damsel-in-distress routine, you just watch and see if it isn't."

Winslow didn't pay them any mind. He gripped the jar of pickles and, grunting, unscrewed the cap. Debbi cheered him. He blushed.

"My boyfriend used to always have pickles with his sandwiches," she said, taking a long slice of dill from the jar.

"Oh . . . you have a boyfriend?"

"Not anymore." She flipped the juice from the pickle and placed the end of it in Winslow's mouth. He blushed again.

"Great," said the thermos. "A monochromatic chameleon."

"Uh-oh," said Barney Sheetz. "Check it out. Titmouse is makin' time with that new girl . . . the one that turned you down this morning."

Hugo Slaughter looked across the room. It was true. They were sitting together, laughing, swinging the world by its tail.

"We can't have this," he said, rising. Barney trailed.

"Hey, Winslow," Hugo growled. "Think you could give me a hand with this bottle of beer? Cap must be stuck, but a real strongman like you shouldn't have any problems, now isn't that right, Barney?"

"Oh, right, Mr. Slaughter. Right."

"Sure, Mr. Slaughter. Let's see, here . . ."

Winslow took the bottle firmly in hand. It tried to mumble something but his palm muffled it. Debbi cringed. She'd seen a million just like Hugo and Barney. Winslow strained. The bottle grumbled. The top blew off. Beer geysered.

"Sucker," the bottle chortled. "I tried to tell you. God, what a ma-roon!"

Winslow sat dumbly in the puddle of beer. The last of the foam bubbled over the lip of the bottle and down his wrist. Debbi was wordlessly embarrassed for him. He was wringing wet. His glasses had been blown off by the eruption. Any other time, he would have said nothing, but he couldn't let Debbi think he could not defend himself.

And then he remembered: the Karma Man had given him three wishes. It was about time to start collecting on that outstanding bill.

"I wish I could teach him a lesson he'd never forget," he hissed under his breath, and a raw, new confidence roared through his veins like a radioactive freight-train. He swaggered to Hugo, tossing the empty beer bottle aside.

"Mr. Slaughter . . ." Winslow tapped the guffawing foreman on the shoulder; "I demand an apology — now!"

Debbi covered her eyes. Hugo stopped laughing for a moment, only long enough to store some wind for his next shattering horselaugh. Winslow deflated like a pricked balloon. He swung unconvincingly at Hugo (he was committed now). Hugo dodged — there wasn't any experience behind Winslow's punch — and Hugo lunged forward for the kill.

His ham-sized fist cannonballed into Winslow's stomach, then his chest, his mouth, his nose. Winslow crumpled to the cold, greasy floor and lay there, crumpled and gasping.

"By the way, Winslow," Hugo spat acidly; "it's against company policy to take naps on the job. Hit the clock and don't bother comin' back."

Hugo laughed, and then he and Barney toured the rest of the plant to circulate the story of this new and manly thing they'd just done to a poor soul who'd never knocked anyone down in his entire lifetime.

"Oh, you poor man! It's all right now." Debbi cradled Winslow's mashed face against her firm, inviting breasts. "Did you think you had to prove something to me? Well, it's all right now. I'm here. I'm right here."

She went on, cooing soft words of comfort, kissing over and over again Winslow's broken and bloodied lips. He thought the voices were trying to tell him something, but they were muddled and faint and far away.

WINSLOW SPENT the rest of the afternoon walking along the shoreline of Lake Erie, skipping small, flat stones out across the water. Night was rolling in from the dusky east when he returned to his apartment. He sat leadenly on the overstuffed sofa and kicked off his sandy sneakers.

The lamp asked in a British accent (for it was made in England), "So how was work today, Winslow, ole top?"

"I got fired."

"Winslow!" the Taiwanese clock beside the lamp on the endtable gasped. "Say it ain't so!"

"For brawling."

"You, old buddy?" the houseslipper was incredulous. "C'mon, now . . ."

"It's true," testified the lunchbox. "I was there. I saw it all."

"I was fighting for a girl."

The pillow he was leaning against said, "Not just any girl, I hope?"

"Oh, no," he replied absently, pressing at his flattened nose until he made it throb with pain again. "She's very nice, I'm sure."

"Good family?" the lamp at Winslow's elbow asked.

Julian blinked into view beside the open window. Winslow sat on the couch, staring straight on.

"Hello, Winslow." Julian popped into the room, removed his hat and dropped his gloves inside it, then sat them on the endtable. "Have you been thinking about what I said?"

Winslow turned his black-and-blue face to the shadowy accountant. "Julian," he said flatly, "what the hell happened to my wish?"

"Ah. Perhaps I didn't explain things as well as I originally thought. You see, just wishing doesn't make a thing so. You need the help of your authorized Karma Consultant — that's me — who utilizes this Cosmic Calculator." He tapped the thin box fastened over his heart.

"I lost my job today," Winslow said blackly.

"Yes, I know." Julian worried with a loose cufflink. "But that was all preordained, a part of your karma. You have a truly remarkable job coming up, if you can just be patient."

"Patient, he says," intoned the pillow. "You're gonna starve your ass off and he's puttin' you on hold."

Winslow said matter-of-factly, "I'm going to be needing some money."

"There I can help you." Julian looked up from the cufflink. "In the next year, you're due to come into some money, but we can accelerate this part of your karma and make it happen almost immediately. But I really feel I should warn you about —"

"Oh, God, here it comes," moaned the table. "And you'll just sit there and take it like you always do."

"No, I won't," Winslow promised. He said, "All my life I've gotten screwed — now I finally have the chance to get a little ahead and you're trying to talk me out of it? What kind of gyp is this?"

"It's no gyp. I just felt obligated to warn you that thinking of only yourself can carry ugly consequences."

"I'll risk it."

The Karma Representative drew another calculator from his pocket and gave it to Winslow. He said, "I've punched in \$25,000. But are you sure you won't reconsider?"

But Winslow wouldn't hear him out.

"Well, in that case, clip this to your shirt pocket — over your heart — and wish with all your heart, for that's where wishes are truly made."

Winslow obeyed. The little box, on closer scrutiny, was not made of any material this world is familiar with. The body and buttons seemed to be made of solid light; they seemed to be in motion, they seemed to be alive. They were

very brilliant and sparkling and of every tint and tone, and they were never still, but flowed to and back in rich tides that met and broke and flashed in dainty explosions and fires.

"Got it?" Julian asked. Winslow roused. He'd been preoccupied with the odd calculator. He squeezed his eyes shut, concentrated on his wish, formed it in his mind and nodded.

"Then press the 'Total' button."

He did, and the digits in the quartz grid lit in rainbow-like colors—like the iridescent lights along the edge of a soap bubble—that glowed and flared, then nodded off to darkness. Winslow tingled like someone had jump-started his heart.

"That's it?" He looked disappointedly around the room. "I don't see any money or jewels or Krugerrands or anything."

"No, or course not." Julian polished his pince-nez with his monogrammed silk handkerchief. "Your karma works indirectly. Very mysterious ways and so forth."

The telephone said, "It's for you."

Winslow answered it. It was his mother's friend, Mrs. McGillicutty. She was very distraught and Winslow had to stop her and ask her to start over, slowly.

"I said, your mother was hit by a truck this afternoon. She just passed away in the Mercy General Hospital a few minutes ago."

"And her insurance policy was made out to me for . . . \$25,000," Winslow said, his face turning ashen.

Mrs. McGillicutty said more, but he didn't hear it. He stared blankly at the receiver. The earpiece was stained with earwax and sweat and oil. He'd have to clean it one of these days.

"Your mother's dead, Winslow," said the coffee table.

And the lamp added, "Yes, and you wished her dead, too. Not very sporting, you know."

Debbi punched out and met the bus. She'd spent the whole day blaming herself for what had happened to Winslow. Maybe after she'd had a chance to rinse the factory grime out of her stringy blonde hair, she'd give him a call, just to see how he was doing. The bus began to move.

"You see, Winslow, that was just one of those repercussions I mentioned. Wishing for yourself, you shaved several months off of your mother's life."

"I killed her."

"No," he answered compassionately. "It's true, she would have recovered from her accident otherwise, but her life-chart was laid out before me. You really did her a great kindness. You see, she'd just come from her doctor — he told her she had cancer — that's why she was so preoccupied and didn't see the truck coming. It would have started tearing away at her before long, and she would have been kept alive by machines and misguided intentions, praying night and praying day for release. You've excused her from much needless suffering. Besides," he asked off-handedly, "what do you care? You didn't even like her, did you?"

Winslow considered. "I suppose not."

It wasn't the answer Julian was looking for, but he pressed on. "Well, then?"

"No, I didn't," he declared with conviction. "I didn't like her." His puffy upper lip hooked back over a chipped incisor. "She was so . . . domineering, so hateful." His features softened, as if the hands of a compassionate artist had kneaded all of the anger and resentment away. "I didn't like her very much, but she was my mother, and I loved her."

Julian was inwardly pleased; Winslow's karma was well on the hard road of being balanced. "You should feel pity for her," said the suited man, "because she'll be coming back until she gets it right. That's another one of those things about karma: if you don't resolve your difficulties and differences in this life, when you die, you'll be reincarnated and you'll continue to come back until you let go."

"How horrible!"

"It can be," the auditor said soberly. "But it can also be very optimistic, to clear old accounts and start anew with a clean, fresh tab . . ." He noticed the hurt and desolation in Winslow's eyes, knew he was responsible for its residency. He added soothingly, "It cuts and bites and tears, this life, but keep heart; it only gets better."

"It was still a cheap shot, Winslow," the table reminded.

Winslow sighed. "Yes, it was."

Julian couldn't hear the voices the way Winslow could. He shrugged and hinted: "You have two wishes left and I really do have to be getting back pretty soon . . ."

Winslow paced his apartment, thinking, rejecting, deciding.

"I'd like to teach my boss, Mr. Slaughter, a lesson. I'd like to —"

"Let it go, Winslow," Julian advised sagely. "Ask God to bless and forgive him and then dismiss the matter."

The cuckoo clock from the Black Forest counted the hour in German.

"Ein, zwei, drei . . ."

"I met this girl at work today," Winslow announced abruptly. "I think I like her. I think she likes me. I think I want her. Yes, that's it! I want her!"

The couch shrieked. "You jerk! I have a ketchup stain you ought to wish would go away!"

Julian logged "Girlfriend" in the grid of the calculator, though Winslow hadn't seen the buttons change from numbers to the alphabet.

"Now — close your eyes and wish with —"

"Yes, yes, I know, I know: close my eyes and wish with all my heart."

"Ayuh."

His finger stabbed the "Total" button . . .

A fifty-cent bus ride and a transfer away, Debbi had just finished buttoning a shiny, purple silk blouse, belting her tight, white slacks. She fitted a black velvet choker around her slender throat. She checked a greasy slip of paper. She was able to get Winslow's address from the business office at work. This would be better than a phone call.

Julian was trying to tuck his silk handkerchief back into his breast pocket behind his calculator, but it still didn't feel right, no matter how he arranged it.

"That was wish number two," he explained absently, finally cramming the offending linen into his side pocket. "What do you want for number three?"

"I don't know yet. Maybe I'll let her decide. That's be good karma, wouldn't it?"

"No can do," returned the Karmic Accountant. "These wishes are non-transferable."

"I tell you, Winslow, it was cheap," the table chided him.

"Yeah," the lamp joined in. "The way you got that money . . . wastin' that second wish on some flippin' little tart when you know I could use a new lamp shade . . . have you taken leave of your senses, lad?"

"Cheap, cheap, cheap," the furnishings chanted.

"Shut up, I tell you!" Winslow snapped. "Just shut the hell up!"

"Huh? Who shut up, Winslow? I didn't hear anything."

Winslow studied Julian curiously. "You mean, you can't hear them? You can't hear the voices?"

"Voices?" Julian seemed genuinely puzzled. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Ah! The voices! Yes, of course!"

"Then you do hear them."

The CKA shook his head once, said, "No, but you can. You see, all things in this plane of existence are surrounded by the same energy field. You, Debbi, your boss, the lamp, the clock, the chair, trees, plants, rocks, streams, animals . . . you all share the same Universal Soul; you're all little fragments of a greater thing, like a mosaic. And, since your karma is so out of whack, you're like a broken shortwave radio that picks up millions of broadcasts on one channel."

Winslow had no difficulty accepting that — it made as much sense as anything else he had heard since that morning — but asked, "Why can't you hear the voices? You're the Karma Man . . ."

"Well," Julian said modestly as he adjusted his spectacles, "my karma is on a much higher plane than your own, so I'm not attuned to the same . . . broadcasts . . . as you."

"Okay, but why does the furniture have its own personalities?"

"Oh, that's an easy one, shmuck-o," answered the table. "We're all second-hand. We've been around other people, in our formative years, so we picked up their personality traits."

"So," Winslow deduced, "if I'd gotten new furniture instead of second-hand . . ."

" . . . Then we'd have picked up your personality," finished the pillow. "Soporific."

Winslow smiled, even though it hurt his broken lips. Julian thought it was the only time he'd seen the man smile, just like an old friend had just reminded him of the punchline of a long ago private joke that was still fresh and funny after all these years.

"So I'm not crazy?" Winslow asked hopefully.

"No, you're not crazy," the auditor answered. "A certain few others in your race's history have heard the voices because their karma was . . ." His hands traced senseless designs in the air as he searched for the right word.

"Screwed?" offered Winslow.

Julian winced. "Well, we prefer to think of it as having your credits exceeding your debits, but I can see where you might get the impression your karma is . . ."

"Screwed?"

"Yes."

"You said there were others," Winslow began anxiously. "Like who?"

"Oh, St. Joan d'Arc, Edgar Allan Poe, St. Francis of Assisi . . ."

"Dr. Dolittle," the pillow suggested helpfully. The rest of the furniture giggled.

"Oh, shut up," Winslow demanded tiredly. "You assholes had me convinced I was crazy all these years."

The furniture tried to stifle the laughter, started snickering, snowballed quickly into a Greek chorus of derisive howls and whoops.

"Big boffs, hey guys?" the table guffawed breathlessly. "No, but seriously, Winslow, can't you take a joke?"

"A joke?!" Winslow exploded. "You call this a joke?"

"No," the houseslipper answered solemnly. "Your sex life is a joke."

The furniture roared.

"Never mind them, Winslow," Julian said soothingly, softly. "With your third wish, when your karma is balanced, the voices will all go away."

Julian was greeted with catcalls from the gallery. And Winslow was actually reluctant about letting them go, because a man can get used to *anything*. He argued, "They've been with me all my life . . . they've told me what to do. I don't know if I can make it on my own. Can't you just get rid of the troublemakers?"

"Yeah," said the pillow. "You other guys — take a hike."

But Julian's smile was knowing and wise. He said, "You won't be alone."

Winslow started to ask him what he meant when the doorbell said, "You have company," jolting Winslow like an electric shock. His knees went soft and weak and his heart smashed wildly against his chest.

"Is that . . .?"

Julian smiled a fatherly smile. "You wished for her here, didn't you? Go on, let her in. Oh, don't worry; she can't see me."

Winslow hesitantly opened the door. His breath came in short, hard, choking, dizzying spasms.

"Winslow?" Debbi tried to make out the dark features of his face in the gloomy apartment. He choked down a lump in his throat. It felt like his heart.

"I wanted to see you." Debbi entered the apartment, groping for a light switch.

Winslow shut the door. Debbi found the lamp and turned it on.

"Watch it, you cloth-eared gint!" it protested. "Hunh! So that's the chippie ole Winnie's got the hots for, hey?"

"Don't look like much, do she?" the table ventured.

"Sure doesn't," the pillow agreed. "Shifty eyes. Too close together. Mouth's too small. You know what they say about girls with small mouths . . ."

"Shut up!" Winslow demanded under his breath. The peanut gallery quieted.

"Sit down, Debbi," he said. He sat, propped his bare feet with forced non-chalance up on the coffee table.

"Manners," it reminded. Winslow dropped his feet to the floor. Debbi smiled that sweet smile from the brewery and sat next to him. She winced at his beaten face which bore the colors of a Canadian sunset.

"I've been wanting," he said with a tongue as thick and tough as leather, "that is, I . . . I wanted . . . I was sort of hoping . . ."

"Krutz," denounced the clock.

"Worse than a schoolboy on his first time," the table laughed.

"This is his first time," the lamp revealed.

Winslow flushed, and the lamp and the clock and the table and the pillow all

began to laugh.

"Okay, okay," the pillow was finally able to keep it together long enough to say. "Just do what we tell you and you'll be all right. We'll talk you through this."

"Right," said the sofa. "We've all seen it all done before, and since you've never even been alone in the same room with a girl before . . ."

Winslow shot the couch a deprecatory look.

"Okay," it continued, taking the hint. "The first thing to do is tell her she has lovely eyes. It's a phoney and innocuous line, but women are just shallow and vain enough to fall for it."

Winslow tried the sofa's advice, but his breath was so short and shallow it came out, "You have eyes."

"I know," Debbi said. "So do you."

"This isn't going very well," said the lamp.

"Winslow," Julian offered; "just be yourself. These advances are really unnecessary. She likes you. Don't worry."

"You better listen to us, pal," the pillow warned sternly, "or we'll tell her you're a virgin." Winslow gasped. "Besides, lookit that guy, lookit the fruity way he dresses. He doesn't look like he's had any more women than you have. Now — tell her she has nice boobs."

It was out before he realized what he was saying. The furniture roared like drunken canned laughter. Winslow flushed and sputtered. Debbi slipped to the far end of the davenport.

"Winslow, what in the world . . .?" began Julian.

"Dash it all, old boy, it would appear you're back-sliding," the lamp observed. "Move closer."

He slid down against her, blockading her against the overstuffed arm of the couch.

"Oh, what-ho!" the lamp cheered him on. "Jolly good, jolly good, indeed!"

"Now — go for it!" coached the pillow. "She wants it. Look at her, look at that sleazy outfit, that cheap, kinky, frizzy hair. If you can't get any of that, you may as well turn in your balls."

"Winslow, just be yourself, I tell you," Julian repeated.

"Shut the hell up," barked the pillow. "Faggot."

Winslow's arm looped around Debbi's slender shoulders like a lasso.

"Flench kiss," said the Taiwanese clock. "Tickre her tonsirs."

Their eyes met. They could both feel it, something electric leaping between them, an ember, a spark, a flame . . . Winslow moved closer, slowly closer and gazed into her eyes. It was a moment frozen in time. She didn't resist. He pressed his eager lips against her own small, pouty, anxious mouth.

"Winslow," she murmured dreamily. But the voices were back, louder than ever.

"Okay, that's enough foreplay," said the lamp. "Get it."

Winslow grabbed Debbi roughly, mashed his lips against hers, but there was no love, only lust and longing. This time she did struggle, this time she did resist. Winslow clung to her like a gluey boa constrictor. Their thrashings threw the couch over backwards, bashing them against the wall, ending in a wild tangle of arms and legs.

"Ow, ow, owl!" screamed the sofa. "I knew no good would come of this!"

Winslow groped blindly for his glasses. The fall had knocked them off. Debbi

found them, returned them slightly whopperjawed on his nose.

"I — I'm sorry," Winslow blustered shamedly. The collision with the wall had restored him to his senses and his face was as red as a sunburn. "I don't know what else to say but I'm sorry."

"It's all right," Debbi answered brightly. "Really."

Winslow jabbed his slipping glasses back up onto the bridge of his nose. "No, no, it isn't all right. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before."

"Really?" Debbi asked innocently. She sat down beside him, tucked her legs up beneath her. "It happens to me all the time."

"Maybe you'd better go," he said melodramatically. He stood, hooked his arm around hers and pulled her insistently to her feet.

"Winslow," she began.

He shook his head in resignation. "Thank you for stopping by, but as you can see, I'm fine."

"I'm not," complained the overturned davenport. "You're standing on my face."

Winslow navigated the girl to the door. He held it for her, but could not bring himself to hold her gaze. She left. He slammed the door.

"Hey!" the door groused.

"Sorry."

Julian had righted the overturned sofa and was sitting there rather stiffly and properly. Winslow avoided his eyes, but he could feel them following him everywhere, like one of those paintings of the Savior.

"Good going," taunted the pillow. "Now it's gonna be all over town that you're a rapist. The S.W.A.T. team's probably on their way here right now."

"Oh, Jesus," whined Winslow. "I blew it."

The Karma Man could only concur. "What were you thinking? What could you possibly have been thinking?"

"I wasn't," he returned snidely. "I listened to the furniture."

"I see. Any particular reason why?"

Winslow could offer no explanation.

Julian said sternly, "It's easy to follow, but you all have to work it out for yourselves. Your furniture wants to . . ." He bit his lip ". . . screw . . . your karma."

"But, what about Debbi? I drove her away for good."

"Did you?"

Winslow's eyes lit like the brights on a car, but they dimmed again almost instantly.

"Something the matter, Winslow," asked Julian, working at a loose thread on his jacket.

He spoke haltingly: "I want Debbi . . . I really like her . . . but my mother . . ."

"What about her?" He made a mental note to have Meyerstein, his tailor, check the raveled thread.

"Well, when I think of her, having to come back until she settles things . . . Julian, what if she never gets it right?"

It was Julian now who avoided Winslow's eyes, and his silence was the most eloquent answer of all.

"Can't we use my third wish on her?"

"Yes, if you're sure that's what you want," answered the impeccable Karma. "Maybe you should save it for something really important —" he gave a cursory

glance about the room — like new furniture.”

“Better do as he says, Winslow,” jeered the pillow, “and save that wish for when the toilet backs up. Ever try gettin’ a plumber on Sunday morning? Good luck, brother!”

“I’m sure,” he told Julian.

“You’re learning,” said Julian. “You’re really learning.”

He logged “Absolution” in the calculator’s grid. Winslow thought for a long moment about his mother until his wish took shape. Then he pressed the button before he had the chance to reconsider. That same funny feeling in his heart, like something magic was happening there that he couldn’t explain, no more than he could understand the feeling of release and relief that followed it. He only knew that he felt right, and he told his Karmic Advisor so.

“No regrets?” Julian asked as he unclipped Winslow’s calculator. He made a slight adjustment in its program.

“No,” Winslow answered honestly. “Maybe later, but not right now. Well,” he hesitated. “Did we . . .?”

“Balance your account?” Julian picked up. “Could be. Give it a try.”

Winslow looked hopefully at the pillow, “The doctor X-rayed my head, but he didn’t find anything . . .” But the furniture was as quiet as a schoolhouse over summer vacation, even when Winslow repeated the straight-line. He was stunned, and he felt a little alone now for the first time in his life, the way a student does when he goes away to his first semester at college.

“They’re really gone,” he whispered, afraid that if he said it too loud the voices might come crashing back at any moment to prove him wrong.

“Told you.”

Julian clipped the calculator back on Winslow’s breast pocket.

Winslow was puzzled. “I thought it was balanced?” he questioned.

Julian looked offended. “Who’s the Karma Man around here?”

“Well,” he sputtered, “you are, but you said three wishes . . .”

“I said four, and I’m not accustomed to having my word disputed.” He dusted his hands together. “You’ll reconcile with Debbi in a few months, but let’s just accelerate that part of your karma, shall we? As interest on your account?”

Winslow was overwhelmed by more emotions than he could name or master, and the result was something like a circuit breaker.

“Well?” prodded the CKA. “Go on; punch the ‘Clear’ mode. Don’t you know you can’t keep a woman waiting?”

Winslow excitedly depressed the button — several times.

“One will do,” counseled Julian. Winslow grinned sheepishly and remanded the Cosmic Calculator over to Julian’s custody. He turned it off, slipped it into his side pocket. “She’ll call. In a few minutes. She’ll say she wants to apologize.”

“Apologize? But it was all my fault.”

The dapper man flexed his stubby fingers into his driving gloves. “She’s a remarkable girl, Winslow. You just be sure you treat her right.”

“I will,” he promised solemnly.

Julian winked and squared his hat. “I know you will,” he confided.

“Wait — where are you going?” Winslow felt a sudden flash of fright.

“Back, of course. You don’t need me anymore. The rest is up to you.”

He flicked the “Total” button on his own calculator and faded like a TV picture when the power is cut off. The afterimage burned just long enough to philo-

sophize, "When a man finally finds his own way, Winslow, heaven is kind."

Winslow didn't have long to ponder the remark for the telephone began to ring almost instantly. "Thank you," he whispered, and reached for the jangling receiver.

"WELL, THAT WAS a silly thing to do, Julian," said the smartly-cut jacket in the voice of Meyerstein, his tailor. "Really silly."

"Sure was," agreed the vest. "You knew it was bad karma to interfere anymore, and yet, you deliberately screwed up your own karma to help a gentile. And do you think the boychick even appreciated it?"

"Yes," Julian answered softly. "I'm sure he did."

"'Four wishes' my foot," said his left shoe. "Jerk."

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," chanted his gloves in stereo. "Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid . . ."

"Oh, shut up," groaned his dapper hat. "Oy, what a bunch of assholes!"

Stan Timmons
Mary Stultz

We were both born in July, '56; I have been writing (freelancing, actually) on and off since I was 12 or so, having spent time writing jokes and such for radio jocks, late night local movie hosts, etc. From there I graduated into writing celebrity interviews for the city newspaper, then into writing copy for a local advertising agency, where I met Mary, who was general office manager. It was an odd series of events that ever led up to us getting together in the first place, lending, I think, credence if not proof to the theory of karma.


"Titmouse" is our first joint effort to break the big time, and readers finding more to the story than is readily available on the surface are looking too deeply.

Stan Timmons



BARRY N. MALZBERG

The Trials of Rollo

 H, YOU FOOL, Rollo, oh you fool: and yet you have a decent heart, old onions. Your sins can be said to come from an excess of feeling and perhaps this will save you in the end, good luck chum pawn of darkness. Oh Rollo it is a big story: you create at enormous expense and psychic debt an illegal time machine, travel back to that evening when you lost your own true love. She married the callibrator seven months later, it didn't work, she drowned in Miami Division a decade after that but it could have all been different. If you had but touched her. If you had had the grace to admit fault. Right? Right, Rollo? Right old suspirer, old dribble-face. You heave yourself into that enormously lawbreaking time machine, your belly trembling, small droplets of remorse condensing on your chin. You incantate. This time it will be different. All different; all different.

Ah, Rollo. You travel back in time and space to Dance VI, stumble from the machine, leave it in the corridors disguised as trash for the bearers, take the lift to communications shack and seize the talker. "Helen," you say when you hear her mother's voice. You pant. Pant pant. "I want to talk to Helen, is she there?" Oh let her be there, eh, Prince of Skedaddles?

"Who is this?"

She does not recognize your voice. Ah, *mon frere*, but you and the lady never got along. Was that the problem? Blame it on the *mother*, of course, the woodwork, the climate, the winter wind. "A friend," you say. You dare not introduce yourself. Later, perhaps, amends might be made. Now it is best to conceal identity, you surmise. You were always a terrific surmiser, Rollo. "A friend of Helen's."

"From the school?"

"What school?" you blunder. Helen was a Freestyle at the time you knew her, she had bypassed tutoring. "This is just a friend."

"I'm afraid I don't know who you are or what this is all about. You can't talk to Helen, she's sleeping. She went to bed an hour ago."

"An hour ago?" But of course you have not checked the time: for all you know you have Coincided at three in the morning and this would be the night call of a lunatic. "What time is it anyway?"

"It's two thousand hours. Past Helen's bedtime."

Two thousand hours? But only a child or a very old or sick person would re-

tire so early! And then the truth begins, dimly and unspeakably to break over you my quiver, my *danseur*, it is all too painful, Rollo, let me intercede. I will make an elision for you so that you can deal with this privately; you may retire to the corridors, thank you. Very well now: technically incompetent you have failed to properly calibrate your clumsy time machine, the obsession of love and departures of age have snatched from you the ability to fathom charts and have left an absurd figure out of joint. *Helen is two, not twenty-two*, you have missed intersection by a full score and your own true love, your perishing, your destiny lies in her snuggle bed surrounded by stuffed animals and suspiring in the huge dreams of childhood.

She is a little girl your Helen, a little girl and the machine in your haste to get it working was not geared for return. You saw no need to ever return to your hideous cubicle, your awful chronology, you would make it right with Helen — you, Rollo, you forty-seven-year-old fool! — and live your lives as they should have been. Now you are trapped and the only introduction to Helen you could properly obtain would be to find a tutor's credential.

And then, crumpled cookie of fate, what would you say?

Ah Rollo, this is a sad time, a mad time, narrative poise fails, control is lacking, considerations of transition quite evade: I have made your elision but there is little else to offer. Dry your eyes, Rollo, stop whimpering, this must be faced. You could try to deal with the mother, not unreminiscent of Helen you think, who would be in her late twenties at this time but you know the circumstances of the mother. Helen told you everything. Isn't that one of the reasons you fled? The mother is crazy, Rollo, as crazy — how it hurts to say this but truth must be faced even at forty seven — as Helen herself. (Helen is crazy. A thirty-six year old woman travelling to Miami Division on a recreational to deliberately drown? It was deliberate you know and you think of love of you? For unrequited hopeless longing? Don't, even by your standards, be an ass.)

So what are you going to do? Here you be in the aseptic corridors of Dance VI, 14b Complex, hunched in the communications shack and you are going to have to face this and it might as well be now. Let us think, Rollo, what are you going to do? You cannot return to the burdens of your life, you must remain here in 2122, you will have to manage in a time two decades earlier than the one you planned. You were just a kid in 2122 yourself, it is not familiar. What next?

And what are you going to say? If you could approach her, your pure and gentle love, her dark hair glinting red in the fluorescence, shading to gold through your tears; if you could approach that little girl, touch her, take her hand, held her, what would you say? That she will love you in eighteen years, be damaged in twenty, be long gone in forty? "You will drown, Helen, you will drown for love of me." Is that what you would say? She will be holding a doll, her eyes will be full, her cheeks glinting. "I'm scared of you. You scare me. I want to go home, scary man, bad man."

Scary man, bad man, out-of-time fool. Ah Rollo, none of this is my fault: I could have warned had you but asked. Scary man, bad man, out-of-time fool. "Goodbye," you say into the unit. "Goodbye, goodbye." You break the passage and stand there.

There should be a way, you think, that I can find this two-year-old, let her know I love her; the genes are timeless, in the genes she will know and I will wait, I will be a menial, I will pace twenty years for her to come to me. Maybe fifteen.

Fifteen years, yes. She will be seventeen. And I?

I will be sixty-two and you, Helen, twenty-five years dead for me, your atoms consumed by the ocean, the memory of you hideous because lost. I am a fool, Rollo says aloud. I am a fool. He weeps. How touching.

Me too, Rollo. Watch me cry with you. We weep.

And Helen's asleep.

In the moist and darkness: we'll figure it out. Right? We'd better, dondolier of doom. We'd just better. ●

1980: New Jersey

Barry N. Malzberg

Malzberg has written twenty-six science fiction novels, eight collections, eight co-edited anthologies, and his novel *Beyond Apollo* (Random House, 1972) was the first winner of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for the best science fiction novel of the year. Some of his best known novels include *Galaxies*, *Herovit's World*, *Chorale*, *The Men Inside*, *Underlay*, *In the Enclosure* and *Tactics of Conquest*. Most recent collections are *Malzberg At Large* (Ace, 1979) and *The Man Who Loved the Midnight Lady* (Doubleday, 1980). He has had over 200 science fiction stories in all of the magazines and original anthologies since 1967. He also has had many stories

appear in mystery and men's magazine markets. He served as editor for *Amazing* and *Fantastic* from 4/68 until 10/68. A controversial writer, Malzberg relentlessly and shrewdly examines psychological aspects of his characters and their times. His work is often metaphorical, even surreal, and some readers cannot or will not dig for the treasures. The freedoms inherent in the sf genre allow him to reveal scathing truths about man and society to maximum effect. Malzberg is also a man who has most generously helped many a new writer get his or her start in the writing profession.—EM

'The Lurker Behind the Corner of the Eye'

There are some who don't stand
in front of the eye.

Only the eyes' corners see
them.

You turn to look and they move
to tease your senses, tickle the
grip on things that we all cherished.

They lurk for reasons that you
and I cannot know and for
reasons that they have forgotten.

—Scott E. Green



Julie of the Shadows

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Dall'acqua

If old men could go to the moon for a nickle, Walt and Oral Stacy wouldn't have had enough to get out of sight. What they did have was four walls and heat in the winter, and that beat living on the street any day. Their government checks covered the rent, and, with help from a lot of macaroni and water, they managed to finish each month about even.

I was beginning my vacation leave when I took the apartment next to the Stacys'. Spartan accommodations suit me fine. I'm a Belter. I'll be working the asteroids till I'm fifty. By then I'll either be dead or rich. Either way I won't be poor.

Counting the five month round trip, Belt work keeps a man off Earth nearly seventeen months at a time, and when those short sabbaticals roll around most guys spend them in the high rent tropics — trying to wash the filtered air smells with light rum and dark women. Those guys go back to the Belt soft. They're the ones who don't make it. Me, I plan to be kicking around when I'm twice Oral and Walt's age.

Oral and Walt share a birthday, though they're not twins. They're what you'd call two-thirds of a triplet. Their other brother Jess died of pneumonia seven months back. Now Walt and Oral sit around, watching each other, scared silly the other's going to die next and leave the one alone. Funny thing is, for all their worrying about loneliness, you never saw Walt or Oral go out of their way to say howdy to anyone. Because of that, when the knocker on my door went off, the last person I expected it to be was Walt Stacy.

Walt stood there in the narrow hall, his dead pan hound dog face staring down at me from his bent six foot frame's upper stories. He looked troubled, the way older people always do.

"Lo, Mr. Cheever. Mind if I come in?"

When a seventy year old man calls you Mister, you're older than you think. "Call me Ben," I said, "and I'll let you in. What's on your mind?"

"Oral, Ben," he said, pushing off the door jamb and coming inside. "He got . . ." He stopped, sniffing the air like an old bloodhound. "Beans," he said. "You got beans on."

He was right. On the Belt they feed you paste made of beans and something else. The something else makes the paste taste more like something that should be coming out of you than going in. When on Earth, I make beans my way — beans and water. When the tap water's not too brown, I can make a pot of those things taste like manna.

"I'm sorry as anything to be barging in on you like this, Ben. But I heard you were a Belter, and I need some help."

"I'm a Belter, alright," I answered him. "But if it's a strong man you're looking

Lawrence Connolly

Illustrated by Rick DeMarco

JULIE OF THE SHADOWS 117

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for, you're forty years late. I'm as human as you are. Monster building went out with Harrison Adams."

Walt shook his head. "It takes a smart man to stay alive on the Belt. That's the way I heard it." Walt looked at his shoes. "Tonight I need a smart man."

"Problem?"

"Oral caught a draft last night. Been filling up ever since. His chest is so full now he can hardly breathe."

"Shouldn't you get him to a hospital?"

"Oral don't need a hospital," said Walt. "When folks get old they get a feel for these things. Jess knew when it was his time. Now Oral says he won't make it to dawn. He wants me to get Julie. Says he's got to see her before he moves on."

I was hungry, and I might have been a little short when I said, "Then shouldn't you be out getting her?"

Walt shrugged. "That'd be just fine," he said, "if I knew where she was. She used to work a lunch bar somewhere in Uptown, though Oral's never been too specific as to what kind of place it was. She and Oral were pretty close. That was forty years ago."

"Either you or Oral seen her recently?"

"No. She and Oral made it quits after going together six months. I've never seen her. I was still in the navy when it was going on."

"You sure she's still around?"

"Oral thinks so. She was nineteen to Oral's thirty. That'd put her at about fifty now."

"We could try the phone book."

"We could," said Walt, " 'cept I don't know her last name. All Oral's ever called her is Julie."

"Just Julie?"

"That's how I know he means this Julie," said Walt. "If he meant another he'd have said a last name."

I think I stood there a long time, my beans getting soft, my stomach getting hollow. I was waiting for Walt to say never mind — or, why don't you eat — or something. But he just stood there, waiting for an answer. Old people are good at waiting. I think time flows differently for them.

"What do you want me to do?" I said at last.

"Go through Uptown with me. You're a Belter. If you can find ore in asteroids, you can find one woman in a small city."

I couldn't see his reasoning, but people have crazy ideas about Belters. We're like the cowboys of early America, or the Lunies of the late 1900s. Most Belter myths go back to the twenties, back when building Belters seemed a better idea than training them. Bio-mechanics was the big thing then. There were specialists who could tear you down and build you back to where you'd never recognize yourself. Those were times when Belters worked sixteen hour shifts, and Belters could quit after one year. Even after paying to get your old body back (or one better if you didn't like the old one) you'd have enough left to live happy a long time.

Under other conditions the set up might never have worked, but those were depression years — and Belt work was the only job in town. Looking back, it's easy to see how it all turned so ugly. Mining companies had never gotten mixed up with monster building. That was dirty business. But, if you showed up at their door wired for space, there were never any questions asked. It was a bad set up,

and I suppose there were more than a few broken dreams when Harrison Adams had his day in court. Harrison Adams threw on the brakes without looking to see who'd really be affected. I know all about that now.

I looked at Walt's road map face, his dark circled eyes standing out like two capital cities in a network of wrinkled roads and highways. If I've got one flaw, it's my curiosity. That's what sent me to the Belt when I was nineteen, soon as I reached work age. It's also what made me decide to find out what was so special about that Julie that'd make Oral want to see her rather than go to a hospital.

I looked back into the kitchen, at the Dutch oven sitting over low heat. "I've got to eat," I said. "You go tell Oral we'll look for his Julie. I'll meet you in the hall."

Walt stayed by the door, and for a moment I thought he was going to reconsider. But he followed my gaze into the kitchen.

"Been a long time since I've had beans," he said.

Some people still haven't recovered from the depression. I wrapped an old thermal vest over my hands and carried the Dutch oven next door.

Oral was worse off than I'd imagined. He was sitting in the corner, scared to lie down for fear of suffocating. He was full alright, his insides draining phlegm into bad lungs. He ate a few beans, but it was more from thanks than hunger. A suffocating man doesn't give a tick about an empty stomach. There've been times on the Belt, when my tanks start clicking and it's ninety clicks to the O-station, when I've known the feeling.

We left him in the chair. I tried asking him about Julie, but he just stared, throwing off more heat than a space heater. "You go get Julie," he said. "I'll wait that long."

I wasn't so sure. The life in those eyes looked ready to check out. "Where's she live, Oral? What's Julie's last name?"

"Uptown," he wheezed. "Last I saw her was in Uptown. Ask around. Tell them Julie of the Shadows."

THE SHADOWS had gone down like kindling in the winter of 2023, when depression's bite was chewing holes in everyone's pockets. Oral was right about asking around. The first wino we asked knew about the Shadows. Walt had been a little off about Julie working in a lunch bar. The Shadows Brothel hadn't been the place to go for a dog and shake — not in the usual sense anyway. About Julie the wino was less informed. Seems there'd been a lot of nineteen-year-olds at the Shadows.

Wind blew hard off the river. It smelled of dead fish. Where there's life there's death, and the Monongahela was more alive these days than it had ever been in the last century. You can't produce twenty-first century steel with nineteenth-century technology. Western Pennsylvania's unemployment was already forty percent when the depression hit. Industry had moved into space, and the people in the *great up there* were calling the shots. Earthbound businesses went under, and girls with the right resources walked the streets looking for work. Skin was the trade to be in back then. Food was government controlled. When a man had spare change, he saw to other hungers.

There was a boarding house where the Shadows had been, and the woman at the desk inside looked like a bulldog. I asked her about Julie of the Shadows, and she laughed — hard and dry, like emery cloth on steel. "When a young man goes

looking for an old whore," she said, "I know times are bad. You're a Belter, ain't-cha?"

Working the Belt makes a person move differently at the bottom of a G-well. Two month vacations aren't enough to get the jerk out of a Belter's walk. Most people spot us without looking twice.

"I guess that excuses you," she said, setting a balled fist into her fat chin and resting on the desk. "This spot's been clean for years. You want to do any whoring, you got to head farther up. I'd advise against it though. An old man and a Belter walking around there at night could bring trouble. Folks is crazy up there."

"How far up you talking?"

"I wouldn't go beyond the Seventeen-Hundred Block after dark. And to go beyond the Twenty-First you'd have to give me an armed guard and a good reason even at midday. I've never seen first hand, mind you. But when folks talk about certain things, I listen."

"What kind of things?"

"There's some old style Belters out there what never got changed back to human." She slapped an old registration card on the desk. "Might be a good idea to room here till daylight," she said. "A man like you should be able to find it as well in daylight. Be a lot safer too."

We didn't have till daylight, not with Oral's life going down for the last time in phlegm-flooded lungs. We thanked her and headed out into the dead fish wind.

I'd heard of old style Belters refusing swing back operations. I remember hearing about the clinics when I was a kid. Folks called them monster shops. Their front offices might have told you otherwise, but their reason for being was to crank out organic mining machines and make a profit. If you were nineteen (or willing to lie and say you were) they'd put you under the knife and direct you to the nearest mining company recruiter. Some of those young people had been little guys, the kind that used to send for Johnny Atlas Body Building in the old days, and when they came back from the Belt they decided they liked being one hundred fifty kilograms of solid muscle.

But there was another reason. The initial operation — the one that made a person ready for the Belt and made him look like hell on a haystack — was free. It had to be. Who needs a Belt job when they've got money? But the swing back was a different story. That's where the monster shops made their profit. Some Belters kept the money and did without. In a few cases the money just plain wasn't there — good old Harrison Adams.

Streets grew narrow beyond the Twenty-First Hundred Block, and sleazy bars popped up like marks on a thirteen-year-old face. We picked one at random. The holosign over the door was broken. A freehand scrawl below it said: SAM'S BAR.

We ordered beer and got it in dirty cans. Walt didn't want his — there was dried bird flop on its top. I made him hold it anyway.

We asked around about Julie of the Shadows.

"NEWS LIKE that don't come cheap. What're you offering?"

She filled the chair like old laundry, rolling flesh spilling into loose-fitting folds of her dirty clothes. Her eyes were the color or old cue balls, and they passed from Walt to me — wondering who had the money. I kept thinking I didn't know the Stacys from Cain and Abel, and here I was in hell's armpit being weaseled out

of my vacation stash by a woman who looked like Jell-o in a bag — and all for unrequited love that had been on the rocks since the year I was born. But then I thought of Oral, and the way he'd been chewing his air like a fish out of water. It helped put things in perspective.

The fat lady had as much as said she knew where to find Oral's Julie. If I let her get away with weaseling me it'd be my own fault.

I put a balled up twenty note on the table. She grabbed for it, and I caught her wrist in mid-table.

"Hey, leggo my — "

"I haven't started squeezing yet."

"You're hurting — "

"That's the hand I use for breaking rocks," I told her.

It was a lie, but most people will believe anything about Belters. The fat woman wasn't any different.

We walked with her from the stink into the cold dark outside. She took us off the uptown arteries, walking through tight unlighted capillaries, weaving between windowless walls and high fences. She moved ahead of us, her dark clothes rubbing the walls, her hands finding the way in places where eyes were useless. It wasn't until I looked up to find the stars gone that I realized there was a roof over us. We were inside something. And the fat woman was still moving.

We passed dirty windows, grime-covered glass leaking street and star light. A stairwell opened on our left, stinking of urine and garbage. We followed her inside and up the clanging metal stairs. For a fat woman, this tank could really roll.

We came out on what, by my count, was the seventh floor — more dark windows tossed weak light over empty elevator shafts that elevated the stink from the first floor.

She was moving faster, away from the windows, deeper into a darkening hall. She turned, opened a door, and moved into a night-black room. We went after her, following her panting coughs in the dark. Ahead, another door opened and slammed in the dark. We found it, opened it —

Another slammed — more distant.

She was trying to lose us.

A door later we stopped. There was noise on the stairs — distant clanging under heavy feet. She'd circled around; heading back to the street.

Yet I had the feeling there were still three of us in the seventh-floor dark.

I moved toward Walt, taking his bony arm, stopping, listening. A dozen meters away, something black moved toward us — something big.

There's something about the dark that makes a person think the worst, and I kept thinking about the woman in the boarding house saying, "There's some old style Belters out there what never got changed back to human."

There've been two times in my life when I've been absolutely pee-in-the-pants scared. Once was when a straw boss sent me inside an Exxon mass driver to check a jam. The other time was on that dark seventh floor.

I pulled Walt around, facing what I remembered being the way we'd come. We took a few steps; so did the thing behind us. That was when I decided to damn the torpedoes. I squeezed Walt's arm and took off, full speed ahead.

Huge feet left the floor, taking off after us.

And I ran — full-face into the narrow edge of an open door. My brain flamed out while the rest of me went down like candle wax.

I woke up in a room lighted by a weak glow lamp. Huge arms held me in a gentle vice grip, and a derrick-like head hung over me like rain over a picnic.

And that, friends, is how I came face to face with Julie of the Shadows.

"FUNNY THING," she said. "I used to dream of a day Oral Stacy'd come looking for me. Forty years gives lots of time for plotting revenge. I must have polished that bum off a million times in my dreams."

Kissing that door had given me a mother of a headache. Razor blades were slicing away the backs of my eyeballs. She'd wrapped me in an old thermal blanket, but I was still shaking like September crickets.

"But mother time's a real diplomat," she went on. "Here it is, forty years later. Oral's come crawling back, and all my hate's gone up in daydreams." She raised the glow on the lamp, and the shadows fled her awesome face — a face built to hold up in vacuum; massive and heavily boned. Old style Belters, like orbital-built spaceboats, weren't built for looks — but they'll live through anything.

"How bad is he?" she asked. I was wishing she'd put me down. I felt like a baby with an ugly momma.

"It's like he's breathing through a sponge," said Walt. "Things have been tight. We cut back on heating the apartment to save a few bucks. Last night he caught a draft and —"

"The people we could be if we had money," she said. She looked at me. "But you wouldn't know, would you?"

I shrugged, or tried to — between the thermal blanket and her catcher's mitt hands I was wrapped tighter than a zero-G snack. "I do alright," I said. "Though it's not what Belters like yourself made back —"

"Who are you calling a Belter?"

Now that threw me. I wasn't sure who she was trying to kid. I know my history, and no one gets to look as bad as she did without having gone under the knife for a Belt assignment. I started to answer, but she waved it off.

"Sorry," she said. "Guess there's some things Oral didn't tell you."

Julie of the Shadows set me on the floor and reached for the lamp. She set it between Walt and me so we wouldn't be in the dark. The shadows moved on her face, and she fell silent, breathing deep through her cave-like mouth. I thought she'd dozed off when she broke the silence and told me the story that started forty years ago when both she and Oral had been less hard on the eyes.

We sat, listening in the weak light, to the damndest story either of us had ever heard.

SHE RETURNED with us, back through the building's dark halls and over the dark city streets to the gray building Walt, Oral, and I called home. Walt and I left Julie with Oral and crossed over to my place to fill the late night hunger with warmed-over beans.

Half an hour later, Walt went to check on them. When he wasn't back after a few minutes, I went to check for myself. I found Walt sitting by the window, looking out on the clear dark night. Oral's body lay on the sofa like old clothes; taken off and chucked in the corner. I touched it. It was getting cold. Julie was gone.

I sat with Walt a while, saying nothing, then headed off to bed.

I couldn't sleep.

I kept thinking of Julie and Harrison Adams — the awful twists life puts us

through if we don't play a few moves ahead of the game.

Oral and Julie thought they had a marked deck. They'd met at the Shadows, but the thing went beyond normal customer relations. Julie hated whoring, and she must have done too much talking the night Oral showed up for a taste of heaven. Julie wanted out, and Oral kept going back — the plan grew as easy as their developing hunger for each other. Oral must have been quite a talker, convincing her of his plan that would get her freedom, money, and him all with one blow. He told her about Belt work. Even after paying for a swing back, one year's Belt wages could keep a couple in idle comfort for a long time. He told her she'd have to go. He was too old. That was his story to Julie. Truth was that, though the monster shops claimed not to accept anyone over twenty-five, they would have worked on Methuselah so long as he signed the "of age" agreement.

So Julie went.

After a year of whoring, being a horrid beast for a year didn't seem so bad — not with the future it offered.

So they bet on the spinning wheel between Mars and Jupiter — rocky bits with big promise. They should have made it. They hadn't counted on Harrison Adams.

Oral had never used a last name when mentioning Julie to Walt. That had to have been a touchy area. Forty years ago, Oral wasn't about to let Julie take off for the first step toward the good life without insuring his place in it. He married her the day before she went under the knife, making her Julie Stacy — for better or worse. He hadn't counted on the worst.

As the gaps in Julie's newly toughened hide were being closed, a lawyer fresh from law school was winning his first big case in Washington. Harrison Adams was a wave maker. Building monsters didn't agree with Harrison. He won his case the day Julie showed up at the recruiting office.

She first heard of Harrison Adams while sitting in a large chair under a recruitment sign. If she wanted to work, they told her, she'd have to buy a swing back and report in a month for testing. Monster labor days were over.

She never saw Oral again — until forty years later. The only thing she knew was whoring, and the Shadows wasn't hiring monsters either. Oral saw the writing and took off to parts unknown. Julie went uptown and poured alcohol over the Shadows' west wall, and sent it to blazing hell, watching it go up in smoke like so many glowing dreams.

Then she killed Oral Stacy — every night for forty years, up in the dark of an abandoned Uptown highrise — and revenge's bitter dreams replaced the better dreams that should have been.

It all went together like a mad jig-saw puzzle. All but the end — where Oral tore open the scar that had been so long healing.

The knocker on my door went off.

I checked the clock. It was near dawn. I figured it was Walt wanting to talk. I was wrong.

It was Julie.

"How's the head, Ben?"

With so much dancing in my brain, I'd forgotten about the bump. I fingered it, shying away at its size.

"Guess I'll have to get it looked at," I said. "Where've you been?"

She shrugged — her shoulders were rolling hills. "Walking," she said. "Mind if I come in?"

I didn't.

She squeezed through the door, filling the apartment as a big foot fills a tight shoe. She looked at my match-stick chairs and decided on the bed. I pulled up a chair.

"I tried Walt's door," she said. "He didn't answer. Guess he's got a lot to think about."

"Last I saw him he was looking at the river."

She nodded, keeping silent for a long time. I knew there were troubles in that big head.

I waited for her to decide to let them out.

"If there's one thing I've learned, Ben," she said, "it's that right and wrong work only for lawyers." She started to say something else, but slipped back inside herself.

I heard boats on the river.

She looked at me. "How well did the Stacys live, Ben?"

"They paid the rent," I said. "Not sure what they ate, though — or how often. I made beans tonight, and Walt almost went comatose smelling them."

"That's what I was afraid of."

"How do you mean?"

She pulled out a plastic bank disk. "It was Oral's," she said. "He told me it's good for near twenty grand. Claims he's been saving since he walked out — saving for my swing back. You believe that? Oral Stacy eating water soup so he could stash loose change toward a swing back for Julie."

"Problem?"

"There's Walt to think of. He and Oral were supposed to have been splitting everything fifty-fifty. According to Oral it was more like seventy-thirty."

"And you're asking me for advice?"

She looked at me. Those eyes didn't belong in that face. She'd been pretty once — still was if you only looked at the eyes. "Guess I am," she said.

"Get the swing back."

"You sure?"

"If Walt needs anything I'll see he gets it," I said. "After tonight I feel we're old friends."

"When do you leave?" she asked. "I mean, for the Belt?"

"Seven weeks," I said. "Why?"

"Good," she stood up, easing toward the door. "Because I'm coming back after the operation. I'll have those doctors give me the youngest, finest body and face twenty grand can buy — then I'm coming back to thank you." She turned in the door. "That's a promise, Ben."

I looked up into the light hazel eyes, at the woman trapped in the upper rooms of a condemned building. "Good night, Julie."

"Good night, Ben."

I went back to watching the boats on the river, and after a few minutes I saw Julie leave the building's lower lobby and skip across the street, her massive shoulders swaying with odd grace. The sun was coming up, yellow over the mountains, sending golden rays into the valley. Julie moved into the shadows on the street's far side and was gone.

It was the last time I ever saw Julie of the Shadows.

WALT AND I went to the pound and picked out a dog the day my vacation was up. I wanted him to get a puppy, but he fell in love with a runny eyed bitch with arthritis. Love is strange. We laughed all the way back to the apartment, telling lies about women we'd never known while the dog moped along at Walt's side.

Back at the apartment, the dog curled up on Walt's favorite chair and went to sleep. It was the start of a fine relationship.

Walt didn't want the account I'd set up for him and the dog, but I made him take the bank disk. I paused at the door, turned, and promised to be back in seventeen months. Funny thing, it made me think of Julie, and I left before the irony got too strong.

A person leaving for more than a day shouldn't make promises like that. Life isn't static enough. People only return when it's convenient or if they have to. We can only try to do what we think's right at the time and hope for enough strength to finish the important things.

Oral Stacy was the strongest man I ever knew. ●

We are pebbles in time's river, rolling with the current, crumbling as the force that moves us forward slowly wears us down.

"Julie of the Shadows" contains some impressions that settled on me earlier this year. It is about friendship, beauty's tyranny over ugliness, and time-travel. Perhaps you didn't catch that last part. It may have been too commonplace to notice.

There's nothing sf about time-travel. We all do it, are doing it now, will continue to do it till the river current erodes us entirely — turning our hair white, raising our

hairlines, shortening our breath, shortening our memories. The time-travelers are among us, sleeping in subways, living in parks, sitting forgotten in moss-green rooms where white-shirted people in crepe soles play nurse maid to the past's forgotten children.

I want to think there are people like Ben Cheever. To think there are not would make thoughts of that eroding river unbearable.

— Lawrence Connolly

When We Were Four

When we were four shadows were long. Night's shield
Hid creatures which lived inside drawers. And their
Eyes peering out on snail-like stalks revealed
Not one inch of bodies matted with hair.
When we were young we were told to ignore
Eel-like horrors asleep on the rug and
Waiting 'neath our beds, curled up on the floor;
Eager, we thought, to grab hold of a hand.
Remember how mother came to look in
Empty hall cupboards and under our beds?
Finding no trace of things that had been
Overtly driving us out of our heads.
Ugly things hid till she had left the room;
Ready, and watching, as still as a tomb.

— Lawrence C. Connolly

J. Ray Dettling

THEIR DAILY BREAD

THIS WAY Mister Secretary; the President has been waiting for you."

"Thank you," the somber voice responded, then the tall expressionless Secretary of Agriculture solemnly entered the oval office, nodding only slightly to the two other cabinet members standing to the side. The door closed and latched behind. The drapes were already drawn, and the room became filled with utter silence. A large international vital statistics chart, dated Aug. 1986, dominated the left side with red brackets highlighting the OPEC nations.

The Secretary of Agriculture's eyes dropped after glancing at the chart. His heart pounded hard against his jacket.

After what seemed like a long silence, the President finally spoke, "You have the letter," he said with his hand extended.

The Secretary handed over the brown envelope. On the outside was printed: SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE EYES ONLY. The catatonic silence was broken by the momentary rustling of paper as the President removed the contents, his hands trembling. He took a deep breath, cleared his throat and began to read aloud.

To: Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Jack Leavitt
From: Undersecretary Stanley Carmichael III
File No: _____ Ref: _____
Subject: _____
Date: 6 July, 1981

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am not a racist or a bigot. I believe you know this to be true, however I feel I must say it anyway, because once you read this letter you may have your doubts.

My political career has always been clean. Perhaps I could have accomplished much more had I submitted to the opportunities

of dirty politics, but I didn't. I have always tried to serve my country, and you Mr. Secretary, in the best way I knew how, without resorting to dirty politics and even less ethical schemes to achieve an end. Throughout my whole life I have prided myself on this fact alone. But now that I look back, I see that I was wrong. There are times when the end does justify the means, particularly when inalienable human rights are at stake.

Yes Mr. Secretary, inalienable human rights must be preserved at all costs. And all of us individually and as a nation have the RIGHT to share in the consumption of energy. By now it should be clear that a world committed to over 4 billion people requires modern technology for its survival. And modern technology requires energy — lots of it. Take energy away from us and in a few short weeks humanity will be reduced to a mass of helpless savages.

When an individual or a nation can take this energy away from us, our system has failed us terribly. And that's exactly what has happened. With great dismay I have watched the OPEC Nations sadistically strangle less fortunate nations with impossibly high prices. We have all felt the wrath of their political blackmail, yet we remain dormant while they slowly squeeze the very life from us.

Energy is the lifeblood of civilization. Without it, civilization dies. And while our existence is being threatened by the OPEC Nations, our governmental leaders would never consider a retaliation by withholding our delivery of wheat—something equally as valuable to the OPEC Nations. Our misguided morality has prevented any such form of blackmail.

But what good is a moral nation that

doesn't survive? And that's what is happening to us, Mr. Secretary. We are failing to survive. I have seen what the energy squeeze has done to our humanitarian culture. The violence in the gas lines, the people freezing to death in the winter, the unemployment, the decline in production. And whatever happened to recreation? Our biggest industry has virtually crumbled because people can't buy enough energy to leave their homes.

Mr. Secretary, the OPEC Nations are destroying the very fabric that made America a great nation. And soon our great constitution, the law of our land, will be replaced by the law of the jungle. I just could not sit and let this happen — even if my country could.

After many sleepless nights of wrestling with the problem, an idea occurred to me. But first I must remind you that before I became involved in politics, I was a biochemist. I'm sure you already know this. What you did not know, however, was that my involvement in biochemistry has never really stopped. I have kept in touch with many of the most prominent biochemists in the world, many of which have shared my views on the OPEC Cartel.

I selected a small group of these scientists and presented my idea to them. I must admit my colleagues were appalled at first, but once the Alaskan pipeline sabotage was directly linked to an OPEC conspiracy, I received all the support I needed. Our solution was unique and elegant in its own way in that it was totally non-violent (at least that's the way it was intended). I cannot divulge much about it because it would expose those I am obligated to protect. I can only tell you the effect.

A special biochemical agent was developed and incorporated into the wheat grain before delivery to OPEC. Since I was involved in coordinating the wheat distribution in accordance with our "Food For Peace Program," deployment of the agent was not difficult. The agent was passivated by first combining it with a second agent. The secondary agent breaks away

in the presence of yeast at which time the primary agent becomes active. Its effect is quite subtle, almost too subtle to be noticed for several years.

By the time you read this letter I will have already been dead, and the anomalous vital statistics from the OPEC Nations will have become apparent. Birth rates will be down and there will be no X-male chromosomes. That's right, Mr. Secretary, no female offspring. Let those bloodsucking sons-of-bitches keep their energy — but only for one more generation.

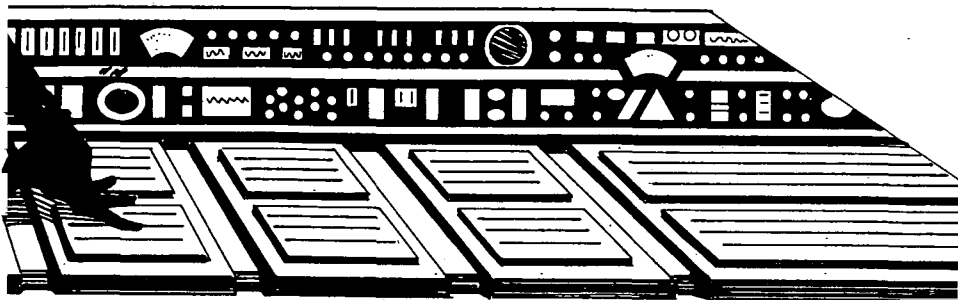
After a long silence, the plump bald man on the right took a hard look at the OPEC chart, and seeing nothing unusual in the statistical data, finally commented, "The Arabians still use unleavened bread; don't they?" ●



WHAT IS LEFT

The stars are few
But cannot lose
That magic of a
Beautifully tuned
Perfection.

—Joey Froelich



Teacher

The microelectronics technician kicked at the unyielding maintenance access panel and howled his anger. Cracked and shrill, his voice violated the tranquil sterility so characteristic of the vaults of City's central control processor. "Bad - Bad - Bad! Nasty old Computer! Bad - Bad - Bad!!" Pudgy little fingers still clasped the offending screwdriver, splayed white, barely spanning the deep grooves in the clear plastic handle. Grooves that fitted a man's hand solidly, allowing for grip and torsion. But the technician wasn't a man. He was just a boy, seven years old, and he continued his frustrated litany, not at all self-conscious about his outburst.

He punctuated each word with another kick at the panel: "Bad - Bad - Bad!!" (Thud - Thud - Thud). Finally, breathless and choking, he threw the screwdriver, feeling a moment's satisfaction as it bounced from the ringing but unscathed panel, then turned to chase it as it spun away down the polished hallway. *Always take good care of your tools* — a lesson from one or another of the long nights under the Teacher — and was the most well-trained and skillful technician in all of City. But Teacher could only shape his mind; it couldn't put a man's strength into his spindly body, or give him the self-control of maturity. So the access panel remained in place, its precisely spaced rows of chromium screws undisturbed by either the boy's tools or his anger. And City would keep on going just like it always had. Demanding more energy. Forcing more and more food from the surrounding farms to store in its dark bowels. The ultimate life support system, integrated, automated, and blindly indifferent to the fact that the lives it supported were growing younger and fewer every year.

The boy finished packing his kit, sliding each item into place behind the

designated leather strap, and snapped it shut. "Bad," he said once again, as he began to move away, but his tone was one of disgust or hatred rather than anger. Animistic, he truly hated Computer, believing it had deliberately set itself to resist his efforts. He tried to say more, feeling somehow that his words were inadequate, but the concepts of curse and obscenity no longer existed, having faded out with succeeding shorter generations. His own father had died at 14, his grandfather at 17. Neither had left the patrimony of profanity. In fact, neither had ever spoken more than a few dimly comprehended words to his son. The boy had been a little less than two years old when his father died.

THE GIRL was angry, too — at Teacher. She was one of the seniors in City, and Teacher had been bringing her to a state of sexual awareness over the past six months. She felt ready now to exercise her new-found knowledge, but her body refused to cooperate. Of late, her morning ritual had included an increasingly disappointing inspection of first the bed, then herself, for the telltales of menarche. Teacher had given her clear instructions about what to do, all in a careful sequence, and the reward would be a baby of her very own. Not a dolly (although Esmerelda was a comfort to snuggle in your arms just before you went under Teacher at night), but a real live baby that moved its hands and feet and would be ever so much fun to play with. Why hadn't Teacher told her it would be so long before she could start? Stupid old Teacher! She slapped the headpiece aside and buried her face in the pillow, coughing. She coughed until an admonition from long ago — if all of nine years can be considered long — drove her to get dressed and set off for Clinic.

Clinic was crowded, and the lines were long, as usual. There always seemed to be more and more people near her age, 9, 10, 11 — none older, some a few years younger. There weren't any 1 and 2 year olds, and she couldn't remember when she'd last seen a baby brought to Clinic. (Stupid Teacher!) She knew it hadn't always been like this, and Teacher said it all began shortly after the days of the Great Expansion, many, many years ago, when City started to need more energy and to store more food and supplies to take care of all the people. Something called "life expectancy" had reached a plateau, then begun to decline. City didn't care. City just went on building more and more power plants, and spraying more and more things on the farms to kill the bugs, and building more and more storerooms, and adding more and more things to the food so it would keep better, and pumping all the waste down into the ground, and just getting bigger and bigger and digging deeper and deeper. The girl began to cough again, because the air was exceptionally acrid this morning. She desperately wanted a drink of water, but the water always tasted so much oilier here at Clinic than at home. She moved up a place in line, and began to rub at the lump on her side. It seemed to be larger than the last time she was here, and was starting to hurt a little. She hoped she would get one of the good doctors today; the ones Teacher had trained lately were so much younger than she, and were always losing their tempers if you weren't careful. She wished she'd brought Esmerelda for company.

Night was falling, and the last man on earth began to whimper and clutch the covers close around him. He was afraid of the dark. ●

Apology for Beeping Things

Each one of us, our own world makes
Our soils composed of common stuff
Yet arrayed in alien configurations that
Confound the ultimate fraternity.

Each one of us, our own world makes
By void of light years, separate.
Awaiting the explorers' feet.

— Mike M. DeSimone

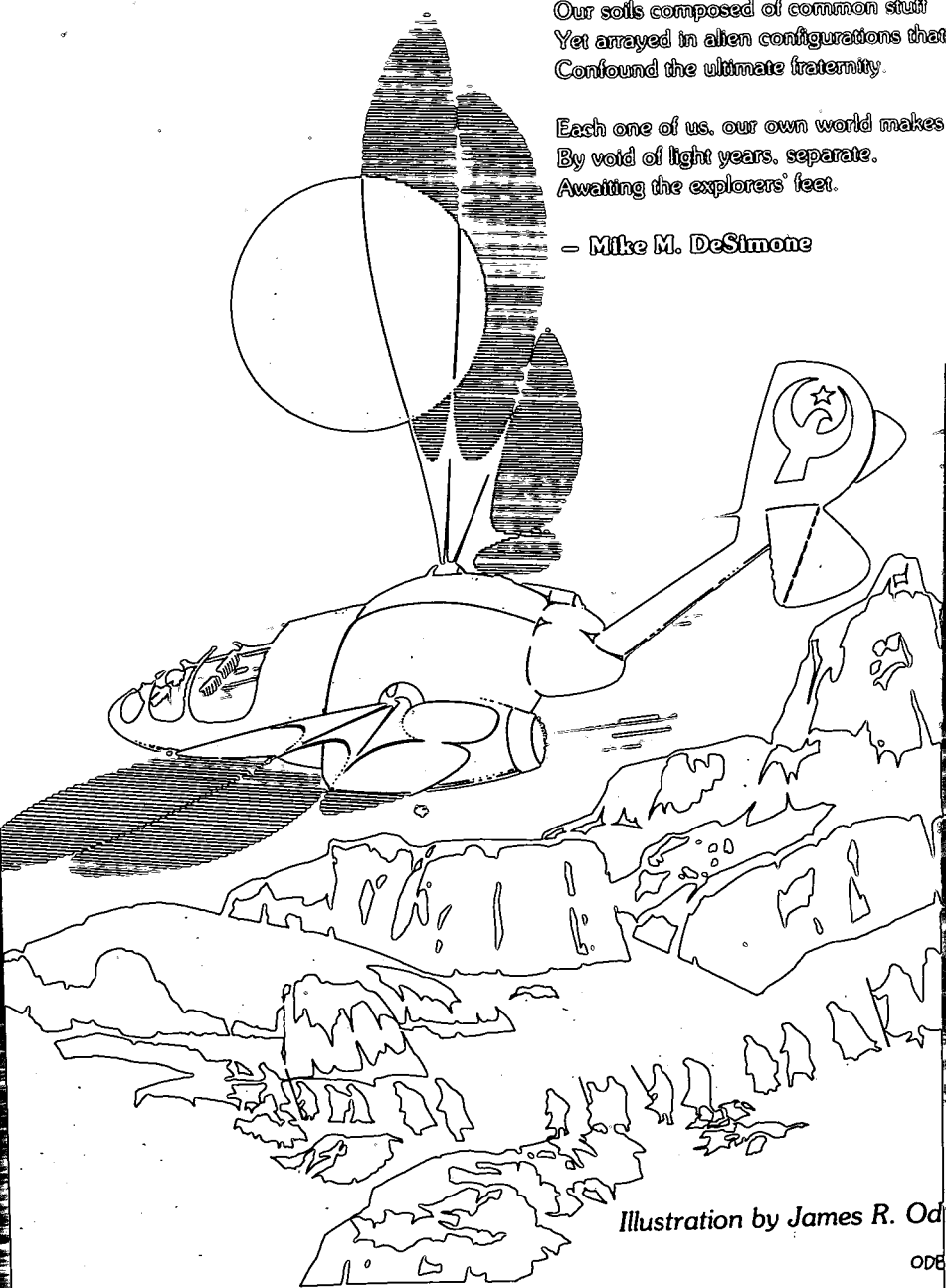


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in this issue:

THE LAST PICASSO

Ron Montana

He was the lone caretaker
of a masterpiece no one
might ever see